

## HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP.

A SERMON BY THE REV. NEWMAN HALL, LL.B.

"Our conversation is in heaven."—Phil. III. 20.

The word rendered "conversation" is *politeuma*, and signifies something relating to a *polis*, a city, or state; whence our word *policy*, and *politics*. The reference of the text may be either to heaven as the Christian's city, or to the conduct, the "conversation," which he should manifest as becometh one whose citizenship is in heaven. It may be well to combine both meanings.

The apostle had been warning the Philippians against those "who mind earthly things," saying, by way of contrast, "For our citizenship is in heaven." We should greatly err if we inferred that St. Paul taught men to neglect earthly things because of their interest in what is heavenly. It is evident that he was not condemning all attention to the affairs of the present life, for the people he refers to are described as those "whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame." It is therefore such a minding of earthly things as is exhibited by those whose god is their belly: it is a *supreme* attention to the things that perish, a putting them in the place which God should occupy—it is this which the apostle condemns, and not the thankful enjoyment of earthly blessings or the diligent discharge of earthly duties.

That heavenly citizenship is not to make us ignore our privileges and duties as citizens of earth is evident both from his example and instruction. This epistle is addressed to the inhabitants of a city where he had been unjustly beaten and imprisoned. The magistrates, having some misgivings, sent an order to the jailor to let him go. But Paul asserted his political rights as a citizen, and said, "They have beaten us openly and uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily! nay verily, but let them come themselves and fetch us out." Again, when the chief captain at Jerusalem would have scourged him, he asserted his citizenship, saying, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a Roman and uncondemned?" And when convinced he should not have a fair trial before a provincial court, he again claimed his political rights as a citizen, saying, "I appeal unto Cæsar." In the Epistle to the Romans, instead of teaching men to neglect public duties as "earthly things," he says that rulers are the ministers of God for good. Christians, whether governors or governed, whether magistrates or private citizens, are to perform their political duties to their *polis* or State, with diligence and in the fear of the Lord. "Render therefore to all their dues." But in these and all other engagements, Christians are to remember that their highest and best citizenship is on high—"Our conversation is in heaven."

I. First let us reflect on the fact that Christians are citizens of heaven.

Heaven is frequently referred to in Scripture under the figure of a city. Its ancient type was Jerusalem, with its temples, walls, and towers. "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." The patriarchs "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Christians are said to have "come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem." "Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." And to St. John, the abode of the blessed was revealed as "the holy city, new Jerusalem." Why, then, are Christians said to have their citizenship in heaven?

We are citizens of heaven by birth. Thus was St. Paul a Roman citizen. "I was free born." Christians have

received a new, a spiritual life. The regenerate are "born again" or "born from above." The vital force by which those "who were dead in trespasses and sins" are raised to life comes down from heaven. "You hath He quickened." We may well claim as our country the place from which we derived our life.

We are citizens of heaven by enrolment. All who are born from above are registered above. "The Lord knoweth those that are his." Their names are "written in the Lamb's book of life." No objection urged against the entry by the accuser shall be deemed valid. However poor and unknown here, all who live by faith in the Son of God are numbered with the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. Whatever the house they occupy here, be it palace or hovel, they are on the register of the celestial city, their record is on high.

We are citizens of heaven by affinity. As strangers a yearn for the home of their birth, so we have instincts and desires which point to our Divine origin. Thus streams flow towards the ocean, the reservoir whence they first were drawn. Thus flames ascend towards the sun, the central source of heat. In regeneration tastes and desires were awakened within us, which nothing earthly can satisfy. Born of God, we aspire towards God, and thus indicate our citizenship.

Our education is a further evidence. A child's future may be inferred from the instruction which he receives to fit him for it. Travellers, preparing for residence in different countries, learn the language and usages of those countries. And Christians are being educated for heaven. The great object of Holy Scripture, and of the teaching of the Divine Spirit, is to train us for the enjoyments and occupations of the Holy City. How can we but regard ourselves citizens of that country for which the means of grace—worship, sacraments, sermons, the communion of saints, the Word of God—are educating us?

This also is the object of afflictions. Earthly trial is heavenly discipline. This is a part of the process whereby we are made "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." Afflictions "work out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." They help to wean us from an excessive attachment to the present world; they remind us that this is not our rest; they prompt us to seek an "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Every sorrow which a believer suffers bears on it the stamp of heaven, and is a missive to remind him that his true citizenship is above.

As our instruction and discipline, so also the exercise of our Christian graces indicates where our country is. "Now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, these three?" and they all point heavenward and lead us thither. Faith is the substance of the heaven hoped for, the evidence of the glory unseen. Hope is ever looking and soaring upwards; her object and realisation, heaven. Charity never faileth; but while finding scope for exercise here, has for her true home and for the sphere of her full and everlasting development, the new Jerusalem. Every Christian lives a life of prayer. But prayer is communion with God. We are daily at heaven's gate; before heaven's throne. And praise is sharing beforehand in the occupations of the blessed. It is heaven anticipated—began below. Do not such exercises as these clearly indicate to what country we belong?

Our citizenship is in heaven because our Father's home is there. Where He dwells we cannot be strangers or foreigners. And of this we are constantly reminded; for in the prayer Divinely taught us we invoke God as "Our Father which art