

for the outburst of love which irradiates its early history. This spontaneous, and abounding love, is manifested in many ways, but chiefly in that provision for the needs of its members which we find here alone in the history of New Testament Christianity. "And all that believe were together, and had all things common; and they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, according as any man had need." "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them said aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." * * * For neither was there among them any that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need."

This is one of the few glimpses we get in New Testament history, of the interior life of the early congregations of Christians. It reveals a family, in which love dwells and reigns; where what belongs to one is at the service of another if he has need; where each seeks the good of all, and all seek the good of each.

That this is not an isolated example of this reign of love in the early Church, is evident from other glimpses which we get as we go on through its history. It is true that nowhere else do we see it taking this form. But elsewhere the same power manifests itself in other ways. Two instances will illustrate its prevalence in widely separated communities.

In the congregation at Joppa, we are told, was "a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas," who "was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did."

It is a short story, but enough is told us to suggest that Dorcas was but an eminent representative of the spirit which reigned in that Church—the spirit of love. Certain it is that all "the disciples" that were at Joppa were in hearty sympathy with her in her deeds of love, and mourned her death, and wished her back. And that "all the widows" took a personal pride in the "coats and garments" which she had made, as though her works were theirs. Here we see love, not only as the strong bond which binds these Christians together, but, also, as the propelling power which impels them in a united work for others. Dorcas is mourned, doubtless, not more because of what she was to others, than because of what she was to them in their work for others.

As our vision sweeps out from the narrow circle of Judea, to the vast Gentile world, we see the same power at work among those who but recently were heathen. A notable manifestation of it is in the contribution made by Gentile churches for the poor Christians in Judea. Famine and distress had fallen upon the latter. Paul appealed to the former for aid for their brethren, not without splendid

success. The churches in Achaia went to work with zeal and enthusiasm to make up a "bounty." The churches of Macedonia, in the abundance of their joy, and even out of their deep poverty, abounded unto a rich liberality in their gifts. They gave even beyond their power, of their own accord, earnestly beseeching the apostle with much entreaty in regard of this grace and fellowship in ministering to the saints.

Here we have even a stronger proof of the mighty sway of love in the early Church. We see it here in its wider aspect, moving the Church as a whole, binding together its most distant parts, leading men to sacrifice for the comfort of others in distant places, and of another race, and whom they had never seen in the flesh, only because they were now members of the same family, heirs of the same hope. Not only did love make the different people of one congregation in the early Church like the members of one family, with common interests, and a common spirit; but it made the different congregations of believers, scattered about over the world, widely separated by distance and earthly circumstance, to have a kindred spirit and a fellow-feeling. It was the invisible bond which ignored space, and earthly distinctions, and made a brotherhood out of people who had never seen one another's faces, and who had no other common interests.

This abounding and pervading love is all the more significant when we remember how the early Church was composed. The passing ages has made deep chasms between men, and built high walls to separate them. Nationality, and social and religious caste, opposed mighty barriers to the common intercourse of men. The Gentile despised the Jew, and the Jew called the Gentile a dog, or a swine. Jews and Samaritans had no dealings one with another. The Pharisee and the Sadducee were at swords points over theological questions; while both looked in holy horror upon the publican and the sinner. The Gentile world was made up of freemen and slaves, with the slaves predominating and held in contempt by their masters. Wisdom and ignorance, want and poverty, the palace and the hovel, were a long way apart in the esteem of men, and separated by impassable barriers in the communications of men.

The Church broke over all bounds in its march. It took no account of nationality or of caste. Within it there was neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, male nor female, theoretically. Yet in reality, all these were found there. The Jew came, in Jerusalem. The Samaritan came, in Samaria. The cultured Roman came in Caesarea, and the cultured Greek in Thessalonica and Berea. The slave came in Antioch, in Corinth, in Rome. The Barbarian came in the remote provinces, and the Jewish priest and Gentile courtier, in the great cities. The infant church had within it all the national and social elements for a

fierce conflagration of hate, and antagonism, and internal warfare. Yet love prevailed. The middle walls of partition had been broken down. The chasms had been bridged. Jew and Gentile had both been reconciled in one body unto God through the cross, by which their old enmity had been slain. The master, who was a bond-servant of Christ, now considered, as his brother, the slave who was Christ's freeman, seeing that both were bond and free alike in him. The rich honored the poor, and helped him, as being with him, and heir of the only enduring inheritance. The great honored the lowly, and the lowly envied not the great, being equally unworthy in themselves and equally great in Christ.

True, this reign of love in the early church was not entirely undisturbed. There was a murmur of jealousy in Jerusalem over alleged partiality in the distribution of the common stores. There was a determined campaign of opposition to Paul and his teaching, on the part of Judaizing teachers in Jerusalem, by which many of the Gentile churches were sorrowfully disturbed and confused. There was a root of sinful selfishness in the Church in Corinth, which bore divisions, and sensualism, and unseemly forgetfulness of one another's welfare. And evidence is not wanting of other infractions of that kingly law which Christ had established in the church.

But these are incidental. They do not indicate the deep current of the life of the Church. They are but the flash, and foam, and ripples, caused by the obstructions of the current, momentarily, by the old passions. The obstruction disappeared in the Jerusalem Church with the appointment of the seven deacons to the work of "serving tables," thus insuring a complete and impartial ministration to the needy; and the current flowed on again smoothly. Paul's severe, but earnest and righteous rebukes in his Epistles to Corinth, seem to have corrected the lapse in the life of that Church, if we can judge from the silence of the Scriptures; and we may cherish the fond conviction that his inimitable picture of love as a life, given in I Cor. xiii., was, at least moderately, realized in those people. While his masterly fight against Judaizing teaching and tendencies, the echo of which meets us in so many of his Epistles, carried the life of the Church up above that obstruction, and permitted it to flow on unhindered.

Marvellous as is this dominion of love in the midst of a loveless world, it is after all, but what must have been. The very nature of the Church presupposes it. The Church was the offspring of love. God loved the Church into being. "Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself up for it." Love was the response which those who composed the Church made to the love of God and Christ in their salvation. "We love because he first loved us." Love is the natural life of the Church. The Church is of God. "God is Love."

It is a beautiful picture, that fresh abounding love of the early Church, with its transforming power over individual life, and over society. It is a picture which the Church in every age could well imitate measureably. "Love is of God." "Let us love one another."