

PERFECTED IN LOVE.

A good Christian friend recently asked us to explain the words at the head of this article, telling us at the same time that it had long seemed impossible to assign any practical meaning to such a phrase. Is there, can there be, any such a thing as perfect love? Are we authorised to use the term? And if authorised, is it wise to use it?

Everything found in the New Testament must be there for some good purpose, and among other things therein contained will be found this phrase. It must have *some* kind of a meaning, and, inasmuch as Christians frequently use it, we should seek to ascertain just what God would have us understand by it. The Church of England offers it up an ever-recurring prayer, "Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, *that we may perfectly love Thee*, and worthily magnify thy holy name." A prayer which is thus constantly upon the lips of millions, which is authorised in the Holy Scriptures, and which gives expression to the ardent desire of many hearts, should certainly be understood. Let us therefore see what meaning the New Testament and Christian experience jointly give to it.

The word perfect, as used most frequently in the New Testament, means finished, or completed. It is both a relative and an absolute term. It is absolute, in that it expresses the completeness of a certain quality in an individual, but it is relative when that individual is contrasted or compared with others. A boy twelve years of age, if in a bad state of health, has strength of body, but not perfect strength. When, however, he fully regains his health, we may truly say that his strength is perfected, meaning simply that he has all the strength a boy twelve years of age can be expected to put forth. We do not affirm that he is omnipotent, nor do we maintain that he is as strong as a robust youth of twenty, but we merely say that, according to his capacity, his strength is perfect. Now if the father of such a child requires him to put forth all his strength in some work which he assigns him, we can easily conceive it

possible for the child to comply with a requirement which is at once reasonable and practicable.

Let us now apply this illustration to God's requirement of us to love Him with *all our strength*. If the soul is in a state of holiness, renewed and cleansed by the Holy Spirit, it will find this commandment not grievous, or in any way impossible. It is perfectly reasonable that we should love the Lord our God with *all* the heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and, according to the measure of our capacity, it is perfectly practicable for us to do so. God never requires impossibilities from his creatures, and He never lays down commandments which have no definite meaning attached to them. He has commanded us to love Him with all our hearts, and nothing can prevent us from obeying the command, unless it be spiritual weakness, an inability to put forth all the strength of our spiritual natures. But the promise expressly states that under the New Covenant Christ stands ready to write the law upon our hearts that we shall be able to meet its obligations. The New Covenant differs from the Old chiefly in this one particular, that, while the latter imposed a burden that could not be borne, the former presented a "light" burden, and an easy yoke. It gave with every obligation the strength needful to fulfil it. Now all the obligations of the New Covenant are concentrated in the one supreme duty to love God and our neighbor, and if this cannot be done with all the strength of our spiritual natures, then a weak point exists in the New Covenant which God has pronounced the "everlasting" one, as fitted for every need and for all times. That Covenant is absolutely perfect, and it imposes no impossibility on man.

As a matter of fact we do not meet many Christians who seem to love God perfectly, that is, with all the intensity and strength of their natures. Most of them confess frankly that they are conscious of not loving Him with their whole hearts, and they feel a certain kind of condemnation for not loving Him more than they do. Some again are in doubt as to whether they love God at all, in the Scriptural sense of the word, although anxiously trying to serve and please Him. In all these cases we find the elements of genuine Christian