

FOR PARISH AND HOME.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT.

V. GENTLENESS.

It is a first principle of Christianity that the Christian is to be Christlike in his life and character. Christ came into the world not only to teach us the truth about God, but also the meaning of the life of man. And His life is the perfect pattern for His followers. The Christian life is to reflect the light which shines from the face of Jesus Christ. It is the moon and not the sun that is the symbol of the Christian church. The moon is like a great mirror. It reflects from its surface the light of the sun, for it has no light in itself. So the Christian is to be a reflector. His light is not in himself, it comes from Christ.

Jesus Christ has furnished His followers with the perfect pattern of a holy life. And St. Paul appeals to his Corinthian converts by the "gentleness of Christ." True gentleness can only be learned in Christ's school. It is a fruit of grace, and not of nature. We cannot imitate the great acts of our Saviour's life, but we can learn from Him the spirit through which they were accomplished.

Gentleness is grandly positive. It is not merely passive. It is not that weakness which yields from sheer want of force, nor that indifference which is careless about consequences if only self's will is not crossed, nor that indolence which gives way from pure laziness. Gentleness is power which acts through a heart made kind and good, the strength of a noble nature, irradiated with the spirit of unselfish love. Henry Martyn found it was the only weapon which could break down pride and prejudice in his dealings with the Brahmins. "And this also I learnt," he says, "that the power of gentleness is irresistible."

Gentleness is the spirit of self-restraint in action. It leaves no room in the heart for anger, no matter what the provocation. It is free from that abruptness and harshness which often mar characters which would otherwise be beautiful. It leaves vengeance to Him to whom it belongs. "Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord."

In his Epistle to the Philippians iv. 5, St. Paul urges the duty of Christian moderation, or, as it is in the Revised Version, forbearance. In the margin of the Revised Version it is translated "gentleness." Luther saw that the Greek conveyed the thought, not of control, but of giving way. And so he translated it in

the German Bible "yieldingness." It is that spirit of "selflessness" which lives for others' good. It was exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ.

"The best of men

That e'er wore earth about Him was a sufferer,
A soft, meek, patient, humble, tranquil spirit,
The first true gentleman that ever breathed."

Gentleness is the richest ornament of man or woman. The old terms of "gentleman" and "gentlewoman," and "lady," are, to an extent, losing their meaning. Gentle meant at first well born, which carried with it the thought of mildness in character and refinement in manners. Now in some quarters the terms are used sometimes in true, sometimes in false, politeness as equivalents for man and woman. The highest types of manhood and womanhood are the result of the influence of the spirit of gentleness uplifting the life. This is what makes the "gentleman" or the "gentlewoman," in the truest and best sense.

When the Christian possesses gentleness he fulfils Solomon's image of the "lily among thorns." He stings not, although his life is surrounded by those whose lives are full of all things that may hurt. The thorn is armed to the teeth, as if its motto were both defence and defiance. It is like an army of spearmen. Sometimes its darts are sharp as they are poisonous. Or it is like the Scotch thistle and the Scotch motto, "No one shall touch me with impunity." But the lily rears its head and lives but to sweeten life. It sheds its gracious perfume abroad, and brightens earth's desert with its smile. So the Christian should bring to life's trials the spirit of Christ, and should be gentle and tender to all.

Gentleness is a most necessary part in character building. No life is really noble without it. Nothing compensates for its absence. It may seem a small thing, and yet it is essential. And the world often notices in us the absence of graces which, with all its unbelief, it expects in the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus. A very remarkable testimony was once borne to the fact that a consistent Christian is the best argument for the truth of Christianity. The Rev. Henry Townley was in his early days of a sceptical turn of mind. This youthful tendency led him to watch with care the currents of infidel opinion. In his old age he held a public discussion with the well-known Mr. George Jacob Holyoake. Mr. Holyoake confessed at the close of the discussion that Mr. Townley's temper and Christian courtesy had

affected him more powerfully than all the arguments in favor of Christianity he had ever listened to. It was said of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow that his whole life was bathed in that sympathy, that love that suffers long and envies not, which forgives unto seventy times seven times, and as many more if need be. This gentleness of character left its mark upon his most expressive face. Charles Kingsley said it was the most beautiful human face he had ever seen. He was gentle to those who injured him, and most forgiving. Edgar Allan Poe, whose great genius could not lighten the dark places of his morbid nature, accused Longfellow of plagiarism and utter want of originality. Longfellow's reply to his tirade of abuse was to lecture to his class at Harvard upon the rich poetic genius of Poe and the marvellous music of his poems. It was the only reply his heart could give. Like our own great Cranmer, to injure him was the surest way to secure his good will.

Christian gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit. It is the gift of God to His children. It is one of the results of the blessed work of the indwelling Christ. Longfellow was a Unitarian. He held what we believe to be an imperfect view of religious truth. He was shut out by his system from the truths we hold most precious, and know to be most fruitful in their uplifting power. Yet his character was richly endowed and his life was sweetened by the Christian graces. And so it is, some lives are richer and better than the creed they profess. The good which we are able to trace in him was God's gift. He lived up to his light. And it was with him, as it is with us, for

"Every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone."

W. J. ARMITAGE.

PEOPLE talk about *special* providences. We should believe in the providences, but not in the specialty. God does not let the thread of our affairs go for one day, and on the next take it up for a moment. The so-called providences are no exception to the rule—they are common to men at all moments. But it is a fact that God's care is more evident in some instances of it than others to the dim and often bewildered vision of humanity; upon such instances men seize and call them providences. It is well that they can, but it would be gloriously better if they could believe that the whole matter is one grand providence. —Selected.