

FOR PARISH AND HOME.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT.

VIII. MEEKNESS.

THE world does not appreciate its greatest men. It often worships at the shrine of success, or gives the highest place to those qualities which gain success, quite regardless of moral ends. It fails in many cases, too, to understand the highest qualities of head and heart.

When Jesus Christ began His wonderful ministry of love and mercy, many were astonished at His teaching, for He spake as never man spake. But the fault-finders of the day heard nothing in His words that breathed of heaven, or that was potent with truth. "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon?" was their estimate of the Man and of His teaching. When Luther raised his voice of thunder, which echoed through the world, there were many found who heaped abuse upon him and his cause. John Milton only lived to be misunderstood. A bishop of the Church could say, "Get thee behind me, Milton, thou cankerworm, thou Shimei, a dead dog, thou savorer of pride, bitterness, and falsehood!" Oliver Cromwell was coupled with Judas Iscariot as one of the worst men that ever lived, yet Carlyle ranked him as one of the world's truest heroes. Professor Reynolds calls him "the greatest of Englishmen," and one who understood his character declared, "A larger soul I think hath seldom dwelt in a house of clay than his was."

It is the same with the noblest virtues, the highest qualities of the heart. Humility is no virtue to the world. Before the Gospel transformed the meaning of the word it meant something that crawled upon the ground. Dickens has held up to scorn its counterfeit as seen in Uriah Heep, who was so very "umble," and meekness, which is in reality a very high development of Christian character, has been considered to be but tameness, or insensibility, or want of proper self-respect. It runs counter to the pride of man's natural heart, and the hard, resentful spirit of the world, and is considered an amiable madness, if not indeed a sign of cowardice, rather than a lofty and noble virtue.

What, then, is true meekness?

It is the spirit of Jesus Christ brought to bear upon human life in all its relations. It is the gentle, loving spirit of the Christian whose mind has been brought into harmony with the mind of Christ, who was

meek and lowly of heart. It is the sweet forbearance of a soul that, through Christ, has won the victory over the lower self, has tamed its natural tendency to anger, violence, and resentment, has curbed the hateful passions which, when given rein, trample and destroy, which knows how divine a thing it is to suffer and be strong, and so returns good for evil. It is that moral strength which, linked with patience and contentment, endows the soul with a might which is irresistible. Dean Stanley, in his exposition of the meaning of "the meek," points out that it is not merely a passive virtue in the character. "Happy," he says, "are the gracious, graceful Christian characters who by their courtesy win all hearts around them, and smooth all the rough places of the world." It is not, as some seem to think, a quiet resignation alone, which is chiefly marked by an uncomplaining attitude towards the acts of others, no matter how trying to flesh and blood; it is rather love in quiet but yet persistent action.

Meekness is love in action. It is seen in the life that has gained something of Christ's spirit. It is what has been called a heart virtue. There is only one place in Scripture, I believe, where the heart of Jesus is mentioned, and it is in connection with the spirit of meekness which He ever showed. "I am meek and lowly in heart." (Matt. xi. 29).

Meekness is a disposition of mind which sees its own faults in contrast with the perfect life of Christ, and seeks to improve them. Lord Brougham once confessed, in a letter to a friend, that pride was his besetting sin, but he added, "I try to conquer it and sometimes succeed." Calvin said that for sixty years he had struggled to master his temper, and had only partially succeeded.

Meekness is power wedded to gentleness. We see it not only in gentle, trusting women, but in strong and forceful men. It is often a reserve power, which is only used in time of trial. When a speaker in the House of Commons endeavored to disparage William Wilberforce as "the honorable and religious gentleman," the taunt brought out the biting sarcasm that it was strange that a "British senate should be required to consider piety a reproach." A member expressed his astonishment at the power of sarcasm Wilberforce had shown for the first time, when Romilly remarked that it illustrated the virtue even more than the genius of Wilberforce; "for who but he has ever possessed so formidable a weapon and never used it?"

Meekness blends the harmlessness of the dove with the courage of the lion. Just as a quick temper is often allied with strong affections, so meekness is often joined to a bold and courageous nature. Moses is an example. Meekness is mentioned in Scripture as his prevailing characteristic. He was the meekest of the sons of men. This meekness did not arise from a placid nature, or from a tame spirit. The old Adam in him was strong and fierce, when he "smote the Egyptian" (Ex. ii. 12); when he stood up single-handed and alone against the shepherds of Midian and protected the daughters of Reuel from their insolence (Ex. ii. 17-19); when in his anger he broke the sacred tables of the law (Ex. xxxii. 19); when at the waters of strife he spoke unadvisedly with his lips (Num. xx. 13). Meekness was the fruit of God's Spirit working in his heart and life. It mellowed his disposition, so that he was able to forgive those who injured him, to speak and act gently towards the erring, and to return good for evil. He sought no honors, no place, for himself or his descendants, but, as Professor Rawlinson points out, "the meek inherit the earth," and Moses, who was highly esteemed during life, gained after death name and fame, more than national, as the emancipator of his race, the great leader of his people, and a legislator whose laws have profoundly influenced all subsequent ages.

Meekness bears with it exceeding rich and precious promises. "The meek shall eat and be satisfied" (Ps. xxii. 26); "The meek will be guide in judgment," and "The meek will he teach his way" (Ps. xxv. 9); "The meek shall inherit the earth" (Ps. xxxvii. 11); "He will beautify the meek with salvation" (Ps. cxlix. 4); "The Lord lifteth up the meek" (Ps. cxlvii. 6); "The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel" (Is. xxix. 19).

W. J. ARMITAGE.

St. Thomas' Rectory,
St. Catharines.

LOSING the temper takes all the sweet, pure feeling out of life. You may get up in the morning with a clean heart, full of song, and start out happy as a bird, and the moment you are crossed and you give way to your temper, the clean feeling vanishes and a load as heavy as lead is rolled upon the heart, and you go through the rest of the day feeling like a culprit.—*Family Churchman.*