

NOTES ON THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

No 3.

THE IDEAL OF LIFE.—PERFECTION.

"**B**E ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (St. Matt. v. 48). To many persons, even of those who are not careless about the things of the kingdom of heaven, this must needs seem to be a hard saying. It is not surprising that attempts should be made to soften down its meaning or to evade its requirements; as, for instance, by those who say that this sermon on the mount is merely an exposition of the Law of Moses, and not a recital of the principles of the kingdom of Christ. For such theories there is certainly no ground. The more deeply we study these words of our Lord, and the more fully we understand the whole spirit of this Gospel, the more perfectly shall we appreciate the intensely Christian and practical significance of this command, and its entire agreement with the general teaching and tenour of the New Testament.

The aim of the discipline of the Lord Jesus Christ is perfection, and nothing short of it; to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. We do not mean that the Christian is to win heaven by the perfection of his obedience. Heaven is already won for him by his Lord, when He had overcome the sharpness of death. He did open the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Nor do we mean that those who profess to have this for the great object and aim of their life, do thereby pretend that any of their thoughts or words or works are perfect before God. But they say that this is the requirement of Christ, that this is the Christian rule of life, and that it is not lawful for them to adopt any principle of action and effort inferior to this or different from this.

Let us mark then, how this Christian law of life separates the member of Christ from those who adopt any different standard. Contrast it for a moment with the precepts of a mere worldly morality. What rule does the world give us for our manner of living? Do as others do. Obey the conventional rules of society. Comply with the customs which are established among your fellow-men. Christ will know nothing of such precepts. He offers no homage to custom. He places before the eyes of His disciples a sublime ideal which—and nothing less than which—must they strive to attain: "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

No less strikingly is this rule distinguished from that Pharisaic righteousness which our Lord condemned in the Sermon on the Mount, but which is not unknown in the Church of Christ. The righteousness of the Pharisees was not only defective in its motive: it was partial and incomplete; it was self-willed and arbitrary. And it was thus faulty in its form and action, because it was defective in its motive. It was a mere selfish morality, and therefore it knew of no ideal save utility.

Or, yet again, we might contrast the Christian rule of life with the requirements of the Law. The Mosaic law sets before us a number

of commands and positive precepts, which it requires us to do. The Christian law sets before us a glorious ideal which it requires us to be. 'Do this and live,' says the Law. 'Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven,' says the Gospel. Instead of a number of isolated commands, it gives us one general, comprehensive, all-embracing principle. And this principle is Love, that love, pure, deep-seated, and earnest, which is everywhere self-forgetful and self-sacrificing. This is the essence of the Divine character, as it was manifested in the life of the incarnate Son; and this is the essence of the life of grace in every regenerate child of God. The rule of action in those who are born again by the incorruptible seed of the word is not pleasure, or happiness, or calculation, or self-interest; it is the perfection of Divine love and goodness as the pattern to which all who follow Jesus are to be conformed.

And the same is everywhere required by the Gospel. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart; and thy neighbour as thyself." What is this, but another form of the words: "Be ye perfect?" We are told over and over again that no other spirit is right, or Christian, or acceptable to God. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling symbol." Charity and charity alone "never faileth."

"Be ye perfect"—does the requirement still seem a hard one? Let us look into it, carefully and earnestly, and we shall see that nothing less could have been demanded of us. The words with which the command is enforced declare as much, and so does the model which they set before our eyes, "even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." God is our Father, and we are His children. It was for this end that "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law," it was "that we might receive the adoption of sons." (Gal. iv. 6.) It was for this end that the Holy Spirit was given to dwell in the Church, "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (Rom. viii. 14.) It was for this end that we were in holy Baptism grafted into the Body of Christ, that we might be members of Christ, children of God, and so inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. But the children should be and must be like their Father; otherwise they cannot be considered His children. And those who call themselves Christians, and yet deliberately adopt a standard which is lower than this, are only sowing in their own hearts, the seeds of alienation and distrust towards their Father in heaven. 'Be ye perfect as your Father is perfect, because He is your Father, and because you are His children.' The requirement is reasonable and necessary, and the reason assigned for it irresistible.

To be continued.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A large quantity of Diocesan News and Correspondence held over for want of space.

WHY SOME CLERGYMEN FAIL.

BY RICHARD FERGUSON.

I AM rather painfully conscious that, in entering upon the consideration of the following subject, I am treading upon somewhat dangerous ground, and so I beg to preface my remarks with the most heartfelt declaration of esteem and deference for that exemplary, sorely tried class of females who form the subject of this article, viz., clergymen's wives, a declaration which I make, let me tell upon my word of honor as a gentleman and clergyman, with all the sincerity and energy of which I am capable, without evasion, equivocation or mental reservation.

Having made this deliverance, however, I am bound to state my opinion that more clergymen fail from the ill-advised interference of their wives in parish affairs, than from any other single cause as yet adduced in these papers. Clergymen suffer not so much from ill-assorted marriages, because, for the matter of that, probably about three-fourths of men get vastly better wives than they deserve—as from the mistaken idea, so fatally prevalent, that a clergyman's wife should of bounden necessity take a very leading part in parish affairs, and bear, in some sort of a way, the same relationship to the female part of the parish as her husband does to the male portion.

We find this notion everywhere common in varying degrees, and especially in the rural districts, where very often a clergyman, unaccompanied by his wife, is scarcely welcome on his pastoral visits, and her failure to visit as regularly and systematically as her husband, constitutes a positive grievance, that not unfrequently imperils the well-being and stability of the parish, and sometimes develops, as can be testified to by parsons not a few, into open rebellion. And then, again, in our towns and villages, who is it that is expected to be the head and shoulders of the "Ladies' Aid," the Social, the Tea Meeting, the Dorcas Society, and all those innumerable parochial side-shows, good, bad and indifferent? those "little foxes" that so insiduously prey upon the clergyman's usefulness and peace of mind. Who but that female admirable Crichton the Clergyman's wife.

And yet, how often is it that the interests of a parish are materially advanced by a clergyman's wife filling the position that public opinion assigns to her, or to go a step further and put it a few degrees stronger, how many parishes are there that can sustain uninjured, the active, aggressive, "co-operation" of the parson's wife. To this, and solely against the grain, candor compels us to answer very, very few.

We hear so much about energetic, zealous clergymen's wives, "good workers," efficient help-mates, and young clergymen are having so industriously dinned into their ears the importance of marrying some woman qualified to act as their first lieutenant in all matters, Extra—sacerdotal that my somewhat bluntly expressed opinions will no doubt appear to