

Pastor and People.

CHRISTIAN ENTHUSIASM.

We summon our readers to a holy enthusiasm for the work of the Lord in this year of grace 1886.

The word "enthusiasm," supposed to have a most honourable origin (*θεος εν θυμω*), was in sad disgrace within the memory of many of us. How disappointing to a young Christian of to-day who takes up Isaac Taylor's "Natural History of Enthusiasm," with the expectation of catching from it fresh inspiration for all that is noblest in human endeavour, to find it a dissertation on fanaticism and folly; and how instructive to read Dr. Chalmers' famous sermon on religious enthusiasm and see how he had to struggle to rescue, not only the word, but the very idea, from the contempt into which even genuine religious earnestness had fallen. Happily we may consider the word now fairly redeemed, so that it may be safely assumed that a call to holy enthusiasm will not be understood as a summons to religious mania.

And yet there is remaining still a widespread suspicion of strong emotional earnestness, especially in religious matters. Nor is this altogether without reason. The emotional nature, standing between the legislative (reason and conscience) and the executive (will) powers of a man, and supplying the motive energy for action, is the especial seat of character, and for this very reason is peculiarly liable to distortion. Passion and prejudice, which so often obscure the reason and silence the conscience, have their hold here; and even obstinacy, which is popularly supposed to be a vice of the will, is really a vice of feeling. And then, just because it is the especial seat of energy, the emotional nature is apt to spurn control. We speak of "fires of passion," and "fires of enthusiasm" too; and such words as "zeal," "fervour," are metaphors from the action of fire. Now while fire under control and direction is most useful and most necessary, nothing is more apt to get beyond control, and to work incalculable mischief after it has transgressed its limits. There is then some reason for the suspicion to which we have referred. But manifestly the safeguard against the dangers hinted at is not repression, but proper guidance. Recalling what has been said as to the relation of the feelings to the other faculties, we may lay it down as necessary that enthusiasm should be founded on reason, controlled by conscience, and directed to action through the will. Let enthusiasm be only subject to these conditions, and it is an unmixed good, and may be allowed the fullest scope with the happiest results. Founded on reason—this will exclude all visionary enthusiasm; controlled by conscience—this will exclude unworthy and undue enthusiasm; directed to action—this will exclude all empty enthusiasm; and the combination of the three will be a guarantee against spasmodic enthusiasm. Now the enthusiasm or fervour, which is so earnestly commended to us in the Word of God, both by precept and example, is safe in all these respects. It is founded on a system of truth, which comes, not as a mere speculation of the human mind, but on divine authority. It appeals most powerfully to that which is highest and best in us, and carries with it the testimony of conscience in so high a degree that even those who most vigorously dispute the divine authority cannot help admiring the lofty morality of the Christian system. And then it is continually directed to action. Everything has a practical bearing. Holiness of life, and devotion to the best interests of humanity, is the noble end which is unswervingly kept in view.

It cannot be denied that there are counterfeits of genuine spiritual earnestness, which are by all means to be discountenanced. But the test we have suggested will be found sufficient to distinguish the false from the true. Take, for example, the mere physical excitement which is characteristic of a certain kind of "revival meeting." Apply the tests. Is the emotion founded on reason, derived from some fresh and powerful view of truth which has been presented to the mind? Is the conscience called into vigorous action by the emotion, and is there awakened an earnest desire to work out in the future life the good resolutions which the present emotion so strongly prompts? There are those who think that the essence of sensationalism is its appealing to the feelings, and hence suppose that all appeals to the feelings savour of the sensational. Not at all. It depends on what the feelings are which are appealed to. If the appeal is to mere feeling, *i.e.* to feeling which terminates on itself, then it is sensational; but if the appeal is to those emotions which prompt the soul to its highest and holiest endeavour, it is far otherwise—there is genuine spiritual power.

Genuine enthusiasm is not measured by words, or by shouts, or by tears. It is measured by deeds. That which evaporates in words, or rushes out in the escaped steam of eloquence, does not count for work. We have just been reading the Memoirs of the late General Grant—a silent man, who let off no steam, but had always plenty on. If you would measure the enthusiasm with which he advanced to the great achievement of his life, you will be all at fault if you

look at what he said, but you will be right if you consider what he did.

There is no objection to repressed enthusiasm, if it is only the expression of it that is repressed, and not the thing itself. And yet it is not well to repress too much the expression of it. If by expression it evaporates or escapes, then by all means bottle it up. I ut if by expressing it you give it strength, as is not at all unlikely, and not only so, but help to kindle other souls, by all means give it free expression. Let us not be ashamed of it. "Be fervent in spirit," and try to kindle and fan the flame of fervour pure and true in other hearts.

Enthusiasm may not be confounded with excitability. Excitability may be weakness; enthusiasm is strength. Excitability may lead to a spasmodic enthusiasm. But what is wanted, above all things, is perseverance and persistency. The deepest and most earnest enthusiasm may be found in the calmest natures. Our Lord Himself could say: "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up." Yet who so calm as He?

Come, then, for a year of high and holy enthusiasm. Let us stir up our souls and all that is within us. If there were only half as much Christian enthusiasm in the land as there is business enthusiasm, or even political enthusiasm, what a change we should see! And why should there not be altogether as much? Why should there not be much more? The author of "Ecce Homo," in trying to translate the Holy Spirit into the philosophic (?) language of the nineteenth century, gives as equivalent, "the enthusiasm of humanity." There is this much truth in it, that the Holy Spirit is the source, and the only source, of genuine spiritual enthusiasm. Let us, then, by all means, in this year of grace opening before us, seek to "be filled with the Spirit," the Spirit of God, who is Love—the Spirit of Him who went about doing good and gave Himself a ransom for others—the Spirit of Holiness, of Life and of Power.—*J. Munro Gibson, D.D.*

STAY THOU NEAR BY.

BY REV. D. MITCHELL, BELLEVILLE, ONT.

Stay Thou near by, O God above,
Look on Thy child with tender love,
May help to me be always given
To lead me on the way to Heaven.

Stay Thou near by, let grace be mine,
To make me pure and keep me Thine.
Through all life's way shine Thou on me
That I may ne'er depart from Thee.

'Mid toil and care, stay Thou near by,
Be Thou my Rock more high than I,
In which my soul will find her rest
And be with Thee for ever blest.

Stay Thou near by, that when my foes
Would cast me down to lasting woes,
My bleeding heart will then be free
With hope and joy to look to Thee.

Stay Thou near by, that work be done
To honour Thee, my God, alone,
Work—that I lost souls may win
From darkest woes, from hell of sin.

O Saviour dear, stay Thou near by
That when to death I'm drawing nigh;
I may not fear or doubting be,
But still find peace and joy in Thee.

And then on wings of faith I'll rise
To Thy pure mansions in the skies,
No more my soul shall need to cry,
Oh loving Friend, stay Thou near by.

THE STAR IN THE EAST.

The *prima facie* view that that star was some supernatural light, such as the pillar of fire in the wilderness, was the universal opinion in the Church till the time of Kepler. But in the month of December, 1603, there occurred a remarkable conjunction of the two largest planets, Jupiter and Saturn; and in the spring of the following year the planet Mars joined in the conjunction; and, what made that remarkable conjunction more remarkable still, a new star of first magnitude shone out of the dark sky in their immediate neighbourhood. While working on this remarkable conjunction and apposition, it struck Kepler to make a retrograde calculation in order to ascertain whether it might not have been this very conjunction that the Chaldean astrologers saw at the beginning of the Christian era; and what he had boldly guessed came true to the letter when his calculations were completed. And thus he was able to tell to the readers of Matthew in his day that the star-seers of Chaldea had seen and studied the very conjunction and constellation that were at that time attracting every eye in Europe. "About the time of the birth of our Lord," says an eminent living astronomer, who does not accept this interpretation of the passage,—"at the birth of our Lord, there can be no doubt that Jupiter would present to the astronomers of that day a most magnificent spectacle. It was then at its most

brilliant apparition, for it was at its nearest approach to the sun and to the earth. Not far from it would be seen its duller and much less conspicuous companion, Saturn. This glorious spectacle continued almost unaltered for several days, when the planets again slowly separated, then came to a halt; when again Jupiter approached for the third time a conjunction with Saturn, as the Magi may be supposed to have entered the holy city. And to complete the fascination of the tale, about an hour and a half after sunset the two planets might be seen from Jerusalem hanging as it were in the meridian, and suspended over Bethlehem in the distance. No celestial phenomena," adds this eminent astronomer—"no celestial phenomena of ancient date are so certainly ascertained as the phenomena in question." There were other remarkable and arresting celestial phenomena that were gathered into those years in which the Saviour was born, and it is surely neither superstition nor undue credulity to ponder such things with sobriety and seriousness. Leibnitz, one of our Western Magi, has developed an acute system of philosophy, which he calls the Doctrine of a Pre-established Harmony. This is nothing less than a philosophic way of stating what Scripture is full of—namely, that all things work together from the beginning of the world according to the will and predestination of Almighty God. And this remarkable combination of occurrences now before us is just an outstanding example of this pre-established harmony. The things here harmonized are the fulness to time and the birth of our Lord; the widespread expectation of the Messiah; the nightly studies of the wise men of Chaldea; and the remarkable conjunction of the ruling planets; and then either their guidance of the wise men, or, to complete the harmonious circle of Divinely ordered events, some miraculously exhibited stellar or atmospheric light to lead the feet of those Mesopotamian proselytes to the cradle of God's Incarnate Son.—*Alexander Whyte, D.D.*

RESULTS OF CONVERSION.

Joseph Cook concludes his last week's Monday lecture on "Man's Part in Conversion," as follows:

What are the results of total self-surrender to God, as known to universal ethical experience? Peace, spiritual illumination, hatred of sin, admiration of holiness, a strange, new sense of the divine presence, a feeling of union with God, a love of prayer. Even in the sphere which historic Christianity has not reached, there will be, after total self-surrender, as I hold, at least a dim sense of forgiveness, the feeling that one can say "Abba, Father"; a new delight in God's works and in His Word; love of man; loss of fear of death; a growing and finally supreme love of the Father, Redeemer, Ruler, Saviour, which has become the soul's all.

An evangelist of great experience and wisdom has distributed many thousands of cards on which were printed the following evidences of conversion. He speaks from the point of view of exegetical knowledge. I have spoken thus far from the point of view of ethical science, strictly so-called. Let me contrast now with my results, these results of a practical evangelist. These are the signs of conversion which Dr. Earle gives:

1. A full surrender of the will to God.
 2. The removal of a burden of sin gradually or suddenly.
 3. A new love to Christians and to Jesus.
 4. A new relish for the Word of God.
 5. Pleasure in secret prayer, at least at times.
 6. Sin or sinful thoughts will cause pain.
 7. Desire and efforts for the salvation of others.
 8. A desire to obey Christ in His commands and ordinances.
 9. Deep humility and self-abasement.
 10. A growing desire to be holy and like Christ.
- As palm matches pain, so God's revelation of Himself in His works matches His revelation of Himself in His Word.

NOW IS THE TIME.

Perhaps there is now a "shy, solitary, serious thought" in your heart about becoming a Christian. If you let it alone it may fly away like a bird through a cage door left open, and may never come back. Or else a crowd of business cares and plans, or perhaps a pressure of social invitations will flock in, and the good thought be smothered to death. You have smothered just such blessed thoughts before. The thought in your heart is to become a Christian now; and the great bell rings out: "Now is the accepted time; behold! now is the day of salvation." No soul was ever yet saved, and no good deed was ever done to-morrow. Be careful, dear friend, lest to-morrow find you beyond the world of probation.—*Dr. T. L. Cuyler.*

To restore a commonplace truth to its first uncommon lustre you need only to translate it into action.—*Coleridge.*

I HAVE never any pity for conceited people, because I think they carry their comfort about with them.—*George Eliot.*