

Christian Love.

S. S. Lesson, Feb. 22nd:—1 Cor. 13: 1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT:—1 Cor. 13: 13. Now abideth faith, hope, charity, but the greatest of these is charity.

BY REV. JAMES W. FALCONER, B. D.

A more excellent way, ch. 12: 31. Mark the contrast between chapters twelve and thirteen. The former describes the endowments and talents of Christians, the latter deals with the graces of the Christian character. It is the eternal question of attainments versus character, gifts as opposed to graces. The attitude of the apostle is that of deep and true spiritual insight. The gifts are all from God, and are to be taken and developed; only they must be made servants of love ruling in the heart. The more excellent way is the way of charity.

Though I speak, v. 1. The gift of apt and eloquent speech is most useful, and offers a great sphere of influence. We are all much affected by the magnetism of language. Words fitly spoken, how good they are! But if pride be the cause of the utterance, if vain impulse lead to self display, the result is disastrous, a sounding brass. All gifts that are abused turn into the worst of faults.

Have all knowledge, v. 2. Knowledge is power; its place is high. But far above knowledge is love. We need not grudge his praise to the man who ransacks the vast storehouse of nature and brings to light its long concealed secrets. We may gratefully accept the gifts won for us by his toil. But he is deserving of higher honor who uses his knowledge, be it small or great, to further the happiness of others. It is not the knowledge of the physician, so much as his kindness of heart, that brings him his reward in the affection of his patients. The dying leader on the battle field who refused a drink of water, that a wounded soldier besides him might have it, won by that self-denying deed a place in the hearts of his men, that no mere military skill, without such spirit of sacrifice, could have given him.

Feed the poor, v. 3. It is beautiful to feed the poor and to give to others, one of the most beautiful indeed of all actions. But it is to be done only to gain popularity and praise it is worthless. Selfishness wilts the flowers of virtue.

Charity suffereth long, v. 4. Since we live in a world that is full of evil, we have need of patience. We are sure to meet with injuries from others. Nor need we expect those to yield easily whom we would persuade to better lives. We may learn a lesson from the sun shining in the heavens. When the springtime comes, and the earth turns its frozen surface more directly towards the sun, it pours down its bright, warm rays steadily day after day, until the frost is melted and the softened soil is ready for the seed. The true way of opposing evil is to keep bringing to bear upon it the constant influence of a loving life. Nothing can withstand such a power.

Is kind, v. 4. "Kind" is from the same root as "kin." Says Archbishop Trench in his book, *On the Study of Words*, "A kind person is one who acknowledges his kinship with other men, and acts upon it; confesses that he owes them, as of one blood with himself, the debt of love." Love leads us to look upon all mankind as one great family, and makes us desire to share with them as our brethren all the good we have. It has wings that fly over the mountains and beyond the seas, and it gives freely to all.

Doth not behave itself unseemly, v. 5.

Behavior is both an index of character and a foundation of influence. It is therefore worth while to learn the secret of true politeness, which is no mere coating of varnish, but springs from deep and abiding sources within. These are none other than love. "Politeness," says Professor Drummond, "has been defined as love in trifles. You know the meaning of the word 'gentleman.' It means a gentle man—a man who does things gently, with love. And that is the whole art and mystery of it."

Shall vanish away, v. 8. Paul is no sentimentalist, even when love is the theme of his praise. His is a hard headed common sense. If you would be truly rich seek after the things which will last forever. (Compare Matt. 6: 19, 20)

We know in part, v. 9. We cannot fully understand God's dealings with us. Many, like Job, are driven by their sufferings to conclude that God is indifferent, even unjust. But such a thought about God must be wrong. His abundant goodness overflows upon a cheap sparrow, and He has revealed His love in Christ. We may be sure that He who has given us such clear proof of His love has a loving purpose in those things also, which are dark to us.

The greatest of these is charity, v. 13. We should be ambitious to make the absolute best out of the life and gifts God has given us. But we should remember that the things we see are temporal. Amid the trials and temptations of this life, or when death approaches, we require a hold upon something everlasting. This love is. It is eternal. It is of the very nature of God; for "God is love." Love will endure after all earthly prizes have perished.

The Riches of Christ.

All wealth, like the Gaul, is divided into three parts. There are the material possessions,—lands, gold, stocks. There are the intellectual possessions,—information, learning, thought. And there are the spiritual possessions,—affections, reverences, faiths. All these are real resources. The world would be poor without its wheat and iron, without its many books and its much learning, and, as Ugo Bassi wrote, "How poor were earth if all its martyrdoms, if all its struggling sighs of sacrifice were swept away!"

A man rich in the spirit that loves and serves and worships is just as really rich, and in a higher order of riches, as one rich in goods. The riches of Christ are riches because they are a resource, a provision, a possession, and an exceeding satisfaction. A man with a fine house to which to turn has a possession, a man with a fine thought or study to which to turn has a possession, and a man with a fervent faith or a devout hope to which to turn has a possession; but these last are those which, as they grow, become the unsearchable, unutterable, eternal riches of glory in Christ Jesus our Lord.—S. S. Times.

Christianity's Demands.

We are apt to forget that Christianity came to establish a new social living as well as a religion, and that from the first it demanded that all the relations between man and man ought to be regulated on Christian principles. That means now that our national laws ought to conform to the principles of the Gospel; it meant then that all disputes were to be settled within the Christian community, and that nothing was to be taken before the heathen tribunals—Principal Lindsay in "The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries,"

FOR DOMINION PRESBYTERIAN.

Bible Study: Four Verses this Time.

Isaiah 55: 10-13; Paper X.

BY ANNA ROSS.

Prayer at the beginning: "Shew me thy thoughts, O Lord—thy thoughts about thine own word."

10th verse, "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and causeth it to bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater."

God begins now to talk to us about the rain, that He may teach us some of His own thoughts about His word. He is shewing a parallel between the rain and this precious word of His, if by any means He may persuade us to sit down seriously to the feast for which He has been calling "Ho!" If we would get His idea we must attend carefully to the rain in the three points given, and then study God's parallel about His word.

1st, The rain comes from above—"from heaven."

2nd, It comes to stay—"it returneth not thither."

3rd, It comes to produce results—to cause growth, blossoms, seed, nourishment. It comes to do all this, and it does it with a fullness and richness that make eyes and heart glad.

God's parallel to all this is given in the 11th and 13th verses. "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth. It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

Here is the parallel, in which the three points noticed about the rain are magnificently counterparted.

1st, His word comes from above, like the rain, beyond the rain, for it comes from the very mouth of God.

2nd, It has come to stay—"it shall not return unto me void."

3rd, It has come to produce results—to twine thorns into fir trees, and briars into fragrant and beautiful myrtle trees, and to do these things in so conspicuous and marvellous a way that "it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

May I suggest a very definite reading of this Divine figure? May it be that the thorns represent unregenerate and selfish men, and the briars unregenerate and selfish women? That the appointed mission of the word of God into this world is to twine hurtful and scraggy masculine characters into trees of righteousness—into men whose whole life shall point heavenward, and whose leaf shall be green for they are not careful in the year of drought, drawing continual supplies of refreshing from the river of God's word beside which they are planted; and also to twine prickly and contemptible feminine characters into the fragrance and beauty and humility of the lowly, lovely myrtle tree into women whose adorning shall not be gold and silver, but "the ornament of a meek and great spirit which is in the sight of God of great price."

13th verse, "For ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands."

This verse for many years was a puzzle.