

Pastor and People.

[For the Presbyterian.]

The Poor and Their Claims.

BY REV. K. W. WAITS.

It may not be out of place at this season of the year, and especially in these "hard times," when we hear so much about "financial depression," to remind the Christian people of our own communion of their duty in regard to the poor. Remember the poor! They are at your doors. They sliver along the streets in the biting air. Some of them are strangers, struggling in their first desperate efforts to make a start in this strange land. Some of them have been here but a few weeks, and yet they have led their children—some one, some two, some three—beside our dead. They are full of sorrow; their money is spent, and thoughts of their first Christmas amongst strangers come gloomily. Run out and see them. Ask your ministers where they are if you do not know. There are others: widows, whose husbands have fallen by their side; the afflicted, whose health has fled; the wretched, who are almost without hope. God has an errand to every one of these. He wants you to go on that errand—Will you? Never mind a few dollars; money laid out at Christmas time to bless others, will be the best investment of the year. Christ has placed Himself behind every poor wretched human being, and from their very misery His voice comes: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me."

I proceed to lay down three or four plain statements or propositions regarding the existence of poverty. First of all I remark that poverty is a national necessity. In every community, however well organized, or however wealthy as a whole, there will be persons brought under sudden misfortune, unexpected bereavement, or some other cause which brings them under the necessity of being aided by others. When speaking of the poor, I wish to be understood to mean those who are so situated as to be obliged to have recourse, more or less, to charity. A working man in full work, and fair wages, who is able to maintain himself and his family comfortably, according to their position in life, and besides that, to lay up a trifle against a day of sickness, cannot with any propriety be called a poor man. In one sense of the word he is so—he is not a wealthy man; but no man is poor who has enough for his present wants, and a trifle to spare to meet a future casualty. And thus I exclude altogether the great bulk of the working classes from such a definition. For although in one point of view they may be poor, yet in another they may be as independent as people with fifty times their income, and in many respects perhaps more so. It is therefore of those absolutely in need that we now speak, in stating that poverty is a national necessity. Sickness will sometimes come unexpectedly and prostrate the strongest man. The father of a family may be struck down by death, or incapacitated from labour, and his family reduced to a position of dependence; then there are those sudden and unexpected fluctuations in trade, against which no amount of forethought and care can fully and effectually provide. Besides this there are wails on society, persons whose bodily strength is not up to the average mark, or whose mental strength is not sufficient to meet the requirements of their position, and who, therefore, are to some extent, the objects of pity rather than of blame. There are some of these everywhere—poor, shiftless, unfortunate sort of people, their fibre is not sufficiently strong or tough to be incorporated into the working fabric of society, and therefore they are thrown off as waste. They must not be totally disregarded; they must be kindly helped and supported.

I observe also that poverty is a providential ordinance. "It is God," saith the Scripture, "who setteth up one, and putteth down another. It is He that maketh poor, and that maketh rich, who bringeth down, and raiseth up." The Psalmist reminds us that promotion "cometh neither from the east nor yet from the south, but God is the judge, He putteth down one and He setteth up another." Observe, it is not said that He levels all. The levelling doctrine is nowhere to be found in Scripture, neither is it compatible with common sense. If the incomes of all persons in Canada were levelled to-morrow, would their incomes be equal on Tuesday? In four-and-twenty hours a great diversity would already have appeared. Some would already have got more, and others would have foolishly spent a great deal of what they had; and before a twelve-month was over, all traces of equality would have completely disappeared. The levelling doctrine may exist in the dreams of some political theorists, but it cannot exist in the sober contemplation of any one who knows human nature. Poverty is a providential ordinance, for it is a part of God's will in the arrangements of society, that the emotions of compassion, pity, tenderness, self-denial, and charity, should find their adequate scope. A community in which all persons were situated exactly alike, as it regards temporal affairs, would be a most unfavourable place for the exercise of some of the choicest and most beautiful Christian virtues. A country that is one unvarying dead level, is much less beautiful to look upon than one which is diversified with hill and dale; and so it is with human society. The inequalities of rank and position are beautiful to look upon; they are ordained by God. The rich and the poor meet together, the Lord being the Maker of them all. If there were no poor, no needy in the land, we would speedily become either brutes or stones—full of hard unfeelingness, and without sufficient exercise for those gentler and more unselfish virtues which form one of the most important developments of the Christian character. Well, but you will say, surely you do not contend that all the poverty that exists is a divine ordinance? Certainly not, if it arise as the result of extravagance or overtrading, of drinking and dissipation, or of licentiousness. We can hardly speak of it then as a providential ordinance; but, at all events, this much is true—it is God's ordinance that punishment should follow vice, that the sinner should

be made to feel his sin. It is God's ordinance that if any will not work neither shall he eat, and that if any will be wasteful and dissipated, he shall be plunged into misery thereby. In that sense, poverty which is to be greatly blamed, may be looked upon as being the appointment of the Almighty. Nor are we to refuse to relieve even the poor. For our Heavenly Father is kind over the unthankful and the ungrateful, cause His sun to shine upon the evil and do good, and His fruitful showers to descend upon the just and upon the unjust.

I remark in the next place, that poverty is no disgrace. It may indeed be disgraceful when it has arisen from some of those causes to which I have just alluded, but in itself there is nothing disgraceful about it. One of the proverbs of Solomon may help us here—"A poor man is better than a liar." It is better to be poor through speaking the truth, than to be rich through lying or any kind of fraud. "A false balance is an abomination to the Lord," and though wealth may flow in as the result of dishonest dealing, yet such wealth "shall perish through evil travail, and though hand join in hand the wicked shall not go unpunished." There is too much tendency in the present state of society to worship wealth. Success in life is too much held up as the mark of which many people should aim. In addressing schools, in addressing workmen, in addressing assemblies of young persons, it is grievous to see how often they are pointed merely to success as the goal at which they should aim. Now, it is far better to point them to virtue, to honesty, to uprightness, and to integrity. In nine cases out of ten worldly success will follow; but supposing, from some misfortune, or some providential appointment, that it should not follow, "Better is he that walketh in his uprightness than he that is perverse in his ways though he be rich."

Observe, again, that poverty has furnished many shining instances of excellence. Some of the wisest and most sagacious of mankind are found amongst the poor. It is true that the counsels of the rich man are more likely to be listened to, and on this point we have a very instructive lesson in the book of Ecclesiastes, the ninth chapter, and the fourteenth verse—"There was a little city, and few men within it, and there came a great king against it and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. Now, there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, wisdom is better than strength. Nevertheless, the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard." True enough is this to human nature, though three thousand years have passed away since it was written. They were glad enough to avail themselves of the skillful scheme of the poor man, and had he been in a different position, they would have crowned him with honour after the city had been delivered. So it is even now. There is too much of a tendency to despise and undervalue the poor and the humble, yet amongst them are found some of the most shining instances of every excellence. They not only possess wisdom but many other Christian virtues. Some of the best followers of the Lord Jesus Christ are found amongst those who must be classed with the poor and the needy. "Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of that kingdom which God hath promised to them that love Him?"

I remark once more that the state of poverty is sanctioned and dignified by the example of our Divine Lord and Master. Poorer than the foxes or than the birds of the air, the Son of Man had not where to lay His head. When the tax-gatherers came and required the customary tribute-money for himself and his disciples, not having the money at command he wrought a miracle in order to meet the case. The mother who bore Him was herself an humble maid of Judah, adorned not with wealth and glittering greatness, but with humble, holy excellency. She possessed, indeed, that ornament which St. Paul especially recommends to women, the incorruptible ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price, and it was of this especially that in her prophetic song she magnified the Lord, because He had exalted the humble and meek, and had been merciful unto those of low degree. Our blessed Lord followed the example of His earthly parents. The people said—"Is not this the son of Joseph?" is not this the carpenter's son?" They were offended in Him. The Lord of all worlds condescended not merely to human nature, but to human nature in its humble form. Had He taken upon Himself the form of a monarch it would have been in finite condescension, but He took upon himself the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Consider then, brethren, what we owe to poverty. The incarnate God Himself battled through life as a poor man, and when He was expiring upon the cross the mother who bore Him had no resource except that He commended her to the charitable care of the beloved disciple. He emptied himself of all but love. As Isaac Barrow says: "The greatest princes and potentates of this world, the haughtiest and the most wealthy of us all, but for one poor man had been irretrievably miserable." To poverty it is that every one of us owes all the hopes we can have of our salvation. And shall we then ungratefully requite it with scorn or with pitiless neglect?

We come now to consider the duty which follows upon this state of things. "Therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in thy land." The duty here recommended is one of kindly and charitable consideration for the needy—of beneficence towards the sorrowful, the unfortunate, and the distressed. Before speaking more particularly, however, of this duty, let me offer one remark by way of caution. It is by no means required of those that are wealthy to be niggardly in their regular expenditure. I can find no Scripture which commands the rich man to spend all his income in charity. This is consistent neither with Scripture nor with the duty which we owe to one another as members of general society.

Suppose that all the wealthy people in England were to break up their costly establishments and devote their incomes, except what was necessary just to provide themselves and their families with the common necessities of life, to the support of the poor and indigent, what would be the consequence? Tens of thousands of servants would be immediately thrown out of employ. Hundreds of thousands of artisans of every kind who derive an honest living present from ministering to the luxuries the wealthy would become paupers, and a whole community would instantly become demoralised. It is a far better thing for the wealthy to find employment for people by a liberal dispersion of their income, than to pauperise them by giving it all away. Our Lord was a poor man, as we have pointed out, and yet, when a rich man made a great feast, our blessed and perfect Master made no scruple of going, nor did He condemn the liberality that was displayed at the feast. He sanctioned by His adorable presence the large expenditure of the wealthy no less than the humble condition of the poor; and in Christ and in the house of God the rich and the poor meet together, God being the Maker of them all. If there is one thing more bitterly opposed to the very spirit of Christianity than another, it is that accursed spirit that would set class against class—that would make the poor envious of the rich, and the rich contemptuous towards the poor. Here in the house of God we are all equal, as being merely men; but outside this house there are various inequalities of rank and position which are in accordance with the appointment of God.

I observe that the duty before us of providing for the poor and needy is enjoined by many express precepts of the Scriptures. The Roman Catholic Church holds, indeed, that the giving of alms is in itself a meritorious act, and tends to cancel the guilt of our sins, and so to procure our salvation. We cannot hold with any such doctrine as this, which upsets the true theory of the atonement made by our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no salvation for the sinner except through faith in Him. The Apostle Paul reminds us that we might give all our goods to the poor, and even our body to be burnt, and yet if we have not love we are nothing. It is not the mere bestowment of alms that constitutes us acceptable in the sight of God. "Man looketh at the outward appearance, but God looketh at the heart," and we are only accepted by God as our hearts are fixed in humble, penitent, obedient faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. "Other foundation can no man lay than is laid, which is Christ Jesus." And yet, not withholding this, "This is a faithful saying," says St. Paul, "that those that have believed in Christ Jesus be careful to maintain good works." We are continually reminded in the New Testament to bring our faith under the test of works, to be judged thereby, as St. James expresses it: "Thou hast faith, and I have works. Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." Your experience is worth nothing unless it is corroborated by your practice. Your feelings are worth nothing if your doings are contrary to them. A sense of the forgiveness of sins, may turn out to be a delusion. The witness of the Spirit may turn out to be nothing more than the imagination of your own heart. Our frames and feelings are not in themselves a sufficient test whereby to judge whether we are in the fold of Christ or not. Examine yourselves, prove your own hearts, is the oft-repeated command of the Word of God; and one way in which we are to examine ourselves is to take the Word of God part by part, command by command, precept by precept, and to inquire, How far have I herein reason to believe that the love of God dwelleth in me? If your faith be genuine it will assuredly display itself as such by its appropriate fruits.

To this particular duty of kindness and charity we are commanded in various parts of the Word of God. There is, for instance, the second great commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" and there is that other form of the same command as given by our Lord, " whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do even so to them." The summary of man's duty as given by the prophet Micah is, "What doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" In the midst of his splendour, and just previous to his approaching fall, the haughty Nebuchadnezzar was reminded by Daniel to break off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by showing mercy unto the poor, if it might be a lengthening of his tranquility. In the days of calamity to the Jewish nation, when a public fast was considered desirable, they were warned by the prophet Isaiah, in the name of the Lord, that the fast which He especially would approve was not the mere external observance, not the mere abstinence from food, not the mere bowing the head like a bulrush, not the mere utterance of prayers. "Is not thus the fast that I have chosen, saith the Lord, to deal out thy bread to the hungry, and to relieve the needy and the poor?"

In the New Testament the same duty is equally enforced. St. Paul exhorts us to distribute to the necessity of saints. The measure of this distribution is to be our ability, our opportunity. "As ye have opportunity, do good unto all men, especially unto them that are of the household of faith." Again, St. Paul writes, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be ready to distribute, willing to communicate." And not only the rich, but all classes of the Church of Christ are similarly commanded. "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, gentleness, longsuffering." And the Apostle John, as he is wont, is more critical and heart-searching than the rest. "Whom hath this world's good, and seen his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

I observe also that the practice of charity is encouraged by many delightful promises of holy Scripture. We have in this blessed book the laws of God's moral administration. Just as truly as there are

laws which regulate the kingdom of nature, concerning gravitation, chemical affinity, magnetic force, and the like, which laws it is the province of our scientific writers to exhibit and explain, so in the moral administration of God, and in that Spiritual Kingdom of which His Son Jesus is head and viceroy, there are laws which are revealed to us by men to whom He was pleased to give a special and infallible insight. They are recorded in this book of the law, that we may learn them and practice them in daily life.

Here are a few of these laws concerning the duty now before us, or rather, a few specimens of this one law, that the practice of charity and kindness and uprightness is sure to be followed with a blessing: "Blessed is he that considereth the poor and the needy; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble; the Lord will make all his bod in his sickness." Take another, "The liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth others shall be watered also himself." Another, "He hath dispersed; he hath given to the poor; his horn shall be exalted with honour."

The reverse is also true—"Whoso stoppeth his ears at the crying of the poor, he also shall cry himself but he shall not be heard." That is a law of the moral administration of God. But perhaps this man may turn out to have been a praying man. Well, what of that? Here is a passage to meet him: "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law even his prayer shall be abomination." You cannot escape from the stringency of Scripture on this point. There is a curse on the one hand, there is a blessing on the other, and it is left to you and me to choose between the two—either to shut up our bowels of compassion and so incur the curse, or else to open our heart and our hand in a spirit of loving kindness and charity, and so to receive the blessing. Position in the church will form no shelter whatever against the descent of God's awful judgments upon those who have been hard-hearted and oppressive. What says the Prophet Isaiah? "The Lord standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people; the Lord will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and with the princes thereof." Observe, they may be ministers, elders, deacons, church-wardens, treasurers, or what not, but they are not thereby exempted from the curse if they have been haughty, avaricious, oppressive, and illiberal. "The Lord will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and with the princes thereof." "What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor, saith the Lord God of hosts?"

But on the other hand how beautiful are the promises given by our Lord Himself to those that are kind to their fellow-creatures, even as our Heavenly Father hath been kind to us. "Lend, hoping for nothing again, and ye shall be the children of your Father which is in heaven." "Give, and it shall be given you again, good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over shall men give into your bosom." Thus also hath the Lord Himself spoken in deploring the glories and splendours of the coming judgment. Our Saviour hath given special prominence to the works of charity and mercy. The Judge of all shall say unto the righteous, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have it unto me, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

Before concluding this article, I would like to exhort you to increased liberality to the poor; especially during this sharp wintry weather. Remember the words of our Saviour, "It is more blessed to give than to receive;" and again, "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver." Your offerings will do good. Many an aching heart will be relieved, many a starting tear will be arrested in its flow, or changed into a tear of gratitude, many a dear child will eat a comfortable meal who might otherwise be crying with hunger, many a home will be relieved of some of its darker shades of dismal grief; the widow's heart will bless you, a mother's tears will thank you, a father's silence will breathe a prayer for you, while Jesus, our common Master, Brother, Saviour, Friend—He who evermore sitteth over against the treasury, and who observeth not only what each man putteth in, but also what each man hath left behind, will smile upon your kind endeavour if it be in accordance with His will, and will treasure up the gift, and will bestow a present and a future recompense. "Therefore to do good and to communicate, forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." St. Andrew's Manse, Watford, Dec. 26, 1876.

Practice Charity.

He who is under the influence of a sincere and conscientious desire to do right, but who has a mistaken or perverted idea of what is right, is not to be cast out of our Christian fellowship on that account. We are to receive him, but not to doubtful disputations. We are not to go at him to set him right by debate, or to mourn over him as a bigot or as an apostate. We are to trust to gradual and genial influence to set him right. On the one hand, we are not to criticize and say, "He is a very good man, but terribly lax about Sunday;" nor, on the other, to condemn, saying, "What a bigot he is about keeping Sunday." Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth." The spirit that despises the so-called narrow-minded and the spirit that condemns the so-called liberal and lax are both alike unchristian. He who is brought under the influence of love and who is in real and hearty personal relations of faith to the Lord Jesus Christ is Christ's; and the method in which he carries out that spirit of love and faith in all matters of eating and drinking, and rites and ceremonies, and days and observances, is a matter for his own determination; for he is answerable only to his own Master. Christianity will have nothing of that despotism of the moral sense, one over another, of which the churches have not a little.

LIGHT of the world, sun of the soul, brighter far than that which cheers the bodily sense; by these all things are seen, yet art Thou Thyself unseen.—Fenelon.

How to see God.

To preserve the right eye, we must keep the right conduct. The purity of the spiritual vision is immensely affected by the character of the life. The right seeing is affected by the right living. Nothing, for instance, so blinds the eye in seeking after God as an immoral life. The sloshy lusts war against the soul; they are what dust or mud are to the bodily eye. He that doth evil cometh not to the light, and without light the eye is useless. It is one of the most fearful punishments of sin that he who loves it and clings to it begins to hate God because He hates sin, and desires to seek after Him as he would dislike seeking after an enemy. The will that is bound to the flesh will not aid the spirit. The feet turn the eye in the wrong direction from that in which God is to be found. As men of science sacrifice time, and deny themselves in what would injure their physical and mental faculties, dim the eye or disturb the calm which is essential to study and discovery, so must the man who would see God, mortify whatever would distract his vision. Unholy passions, as a thick cloud, conceal the vision of God.—Norman MacLeod, D.D.

The Fence Story.

A man who prided himself on his morality, and expected to be saved by it, was constantly saying: "I am doing pretty well on the whole. I sometimes get mad and swear, but then I am perfectly honest. I work on Sunday when I am particularly busy, but I give a good deal to the poor, and I never was drunk in my life." This man hired a canny Scotchman to build a fence around his pasture lot. He gave him very particular directions. In the evening when the Scotchman came in from work, the man said, "well Jock, is the fence built, and is it tight and strong?" "I canna say it is all tight and strong?" Jock replied; "but it's a good average fence, anyhow. If some parts are a little weak, other parts are extra strong. I don't know but I may have left a little gap here and there, a yard or so wide; but then I made up for it by doubling the number of rails on each side of the gap. I dare say that the cattle will find a good fence on the whole, and will like it, though I canna just say that it is perfect in every part." "What!" cried the man not seeing the point, "do you tell me that you built a fence around my lot with weak places and gaps in it? Why, you might as well have built no fence at all. If there is one opening, or a place where an opening can be made, the cattle will be sure to find it, and will go through. Don't you know, man, that a fence must be perfect, or it is worthless?" "I used to think so," said the dry Scotchman, "but I hear you talk so much about averaging matters with the Lord, it seemed to me that we might try it with the cattle. If an average fence will not do for them, I am afraid an average character will not do in the day of judgment."

Random Readings.

O God, let thy Spirit abide with me, to increase my faith, that by fresh supplies of thy grace I may be kept from going about to establish my own righteousness, but may constantly submit to thy righteousness, and so bring forth the fruits of righteousness abundantly to thy glory.—Romans.

MANY a minister in the pulpit—shame on him—betrays his trust to the Bible and his God by teaching religion very much as if it were a mere matter of reason, and human progress, and human discovery, instead of taking God's Word as his authority and instructor, and uttering in the ears of the people, like the old prophets, "Thus saith the Lord."—Spencer.

A MINISTER has no ground to hope for fruit from his exertions until in himself he has no hope—until he has learned to put no faith in the point and energy of his sentences—until he feels that a man may be mighty, to compel the attention, and mighty to regale the imagination, and mighty to silence the gainsayers, and yet not mighty to the pulling down of the strongholds.—Chalmers.

No man can serve two masters, even though they both be very kind. He will love the one and hate the other despite the fact of their mutual good-will. How impossible, then, is it to do such service when one is full of love, mercy and majesty, while the other is harsh, pitiless and debasing? If we give our hearts to Jesus, we must do it without reserve, and no devotion to any other authority than his must be permitted to claim an engrossing share of our affections. It is Jesus only.

God loves to smile upon his people when the world frowns most. When the world puts its iron chain upon their legs, then God puts his golden chain about their necks; when the world puts a bitter cup into their hands then God drops some of His honey, some of His goodness and sweetness into it. When the world is ready to stono them, then God gives them the white stone; and when the world is tearing their good name, then He gives them a new name, which none knows but he that bears it, a name that is better than that of sons and daughters.

How truly refreshing to the soul, when too weak to read or think much, to take a little sentence from God's word and think over it. Take the following: "Justified from all things," or "Made nigh by His blood." "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you." "I have chosen you." Just feast on these four words: "I." Who? Jesus: the altogether lovely one, the delight of God's heart. "Have;" yes, long ago; before the world began, His love fastened on us guilty sinners. "Chosen you." To think that I should be His choice, His chosen one—me, a poor wretched thing. And He need not have me. Hosts of glorious beings were before Him; but He passed them all by, and came down to love a little worm of the dust, and He became like us. "I am a worm and no man." O, may our souls be fattened on the love of Christ; thus shall we be filled with joy and peace.