

The Pulpit.

THE POWER OF GIFTS

BY REV. DR. A. WOOD, FAIRVIEW CHURCH, LONDON

"A man's gift maketh room for him" - Prov. XVIII 16.

"To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge." - I Cor. XII 8.

IV.—(Continued.)

AND just that way came into the world, and just that way worked, the gift of Christian charity. It descended quietly and without welcome into the world. It took possession of outcast women, of crushed slaves, of toiling peasants. It made room in the hearts of human beings both for itself and its possessors. It became a Divine force in human hearts, a power of God unto salvation, an eternal possession for the race, pushing its victories in all directions, and knocking at every gate of entrance on the earth.

We do not see this wonder as we might because we look past its present triumphs to those of the first years of our religion. But what we see when we look to those years is only the first descent: and excitement of the jubilant new life; only the first outbursting of the river which was to make glad the city of God. The wonder remained when the excitement of its first appearance was a mere memory of the past. Only now it began to show itself in processes that were normal, quiet and gradual, like the coming of spring. It is the natural influence of Christian gifts; the gentle, slow, but unceasing breaking out of new thoughts, new hopes, new affections, over wide domains of human life, until those who dwell there, looking around, find themselves unexpectedly in a new world, and hear voices saying: "The kingdom of heaven has come."

The centuries which followed the days of the Apostles are filled with illustrations of this same power of gifts. The saintly lives of the Middle Ages; the songs and hymns of their poets; the doctrines wrought in the fires of debate in their councils; the architecture of their cathedrals; there was the working of this power in them all. But I shall not attempt to illustrate these. The subject opens out on another side.

Gifts are not only powers working for God; they are powers fitted for the time. A need arises: a gift to meet that need is sent. The day darkens; light begins to shine. It is the gracious God providing for the needs of the time.

Transfer your thoughts from the ago of the Apostles to our own. Fix them on the generation to which ourselves belong. Recall the thoughts which people in this country were thinking and the lives they were leading thirty or forty years ago. Recall the trials perilous to their spiritual well-being on which, at that period, they were entering.

And see, in connection with these trials, the counteracting gifts which God in His goodness sent. It is only one or two out of the multitudes of these gifts which I can refer to. And I do not give them as the greatest, that can be named, but as those which I myself am most thankful to have seen. The first of these is a gift of peace.

We all know what one great spiritual gift of our time has been. You all know that new vision of creation, that widening of the material universe by scientific research—and, issuing from that, those strange uneasy questionings that overleaped their legitimate bounds, and reaching far beyond the discoveries, became questionings of the foundation on which our faith was resting. The gift of God to our generation was that all down the years of this unsettling movement we had Tennyson and Browning singing their songs of faith, giving us new forms in which to express the old truths, and lifting our imaginations to a higher plane than that on which the discoveries of science were worked out. The ideas with which Tennyson helped to elevate the thought of our time were the order, the progress, the Divine government of the world. The special blessing in his poetry was that it reflected, while it was not subdued by, the science of time. He beheld the new horizons which it was opening up, and even rejoiced in them; but there was none in which he failed to see the dwelling-place of God. He saw nature "red in tooth and claw," but more clearly the pathos and glory of our human life as set in God. He heard our human cry to God. He recognized the weakness and limitation of it; the crying of an infant in the night, and with no language but a cry; but ever, above all, he saw the possibility of emergence from the weakness, the "unraveling" advance of the individual type towards perfection, and the eternal progression of our race in God.

And one far off divine event To which the whole creation moves. The same blessing was in Browning's poetry, but in a more pronounced form. His songs are songs of the soul, of its possibilities, its triumphs, its failures, its salvation, its immortality. When he tells a story of shame, or the neglect and misuse of talents, he makes you feel that it is the soul that suffers. When he tells of moral triumph, it is the soul that triumphs. He finds glimpses of soul life in the most trivial and in the low. He hears the soul voicing itself under the rags of lost chances and reputations. He looks into the eyes of souls that outwardly seem poor and feeble, but which at some supreme moment flashed out greatness, in insight, in feeling or in achievement. He arrests attention on that. That is a revelation, he will tell you, of what is divine and eternal in those souls. "Tis but a flash here, a gleam on a dark tide, but it is also a foregleam of a higher life. It will be an abiding splendour in heaven by-and-by. Or, he looks into the life of some great soul, rich in art, or faith, but unknown to fame. He listens to him as he builds a glorious temple of music in the organ loft of any empty church. Nobody is interested in him; nobody is listening to him. The poet raises the question: Is it all in vain? Is the end of the man's faculty in this uncareful-for burst of music? No. The music, the life's work of the man, is not lost. It goes up to God.

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"A sermon preached in Westminster Chapel, London, on Sunday evening, February 23, 1857."

The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard, The high that left the ground to lose itself in the sky, Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard, Enough that He heard it once. We shall hear it by-and-by."

We have only to throw ourselves back into the life of the universities and imagine the successive generations of young souls coming up to be prepared for their more tasks, caught on the one side by the troubled murmur of doubt and unsettlement of old beliefs, and on the other with the reassurance, the sea 'yng, the expansion, the lifting-up of the songs of those two men; hearing in the great "In Memoriam" of the one a fore-song of the resurrection, and in his "Idylls" the Christian ideal of life; and in the strong words of the other an audacious assertion of the greatness and importance of the soul—to realize the benefit which God wrought for our age when He sent us those poets with their gift of song.

Many a man is speaking bravely for God in the pulpits of our country to-day who would not have been there but for those two poets. And no memory of their lives is more gratefully recalled than the days at the university, when, in long conferences in their rooms, or happy walks into the country, they and their fellow-students used to recite the favourite passages of the poems, which were helping at the time, and have helped ever since, to stay up their hearts on God.

A blessing as great and as richly fitted to the needs of the time was wrought by the gift I am next to name. Forty years ago there was a self-containment, an unsympathetic hardness, a lack of generous ardour in the general life of our country. As a rule, people were looking at their own interests and not at the interests of others. And there was coming on them almost the greatest trial that can befall a people—a sudden and widespread increase of wealth, and a change in thousands of homes from indigent striving and narrow means to an affluence which brought idleness and luxury in its lap. It was in these circumstances God sent to us a gift of sympathy.

There is nothing which more vividly witnesses to the Divine presence, and nothing in itself more beautiful and more like Himself, than the sympathy for human misery with which God endowed some Christian ladies to meet that state of things.

We have only to recall what the hospitals for the sick were forty years ago, and the character of the nursing, and the hideous life in our poorhouses, and the condition of the children of the poorest, and the lives led by young women who had lost their way, and we shall be able to estimate the greatness of the work to which these ladies set their hearts and hands.

I go back to the Crimean War, and I find Florence Nightingale carrying the tenderness of her heart, and her gentle womanly touch, and her unsurpassed faculty of order, to the wounded soldiers. I come down a few years, and I see her friend, Agnes Jones, bringing her delicate culture, her practical training, her Christian patience and charity, into the poorhouse of this very city, to sweeten and hallow the life of the torn and belated there. I come some years further still, and I see Sister Dora at Wallis, gathering within the shelter of her sympathy and care poor men shattered by railway collisions, or scorched by explosions of molten iron, and making an earthly heaven for them in their suffering by her tender care. At one awful crisis I see her shutting herself up in a pest house—which no other but the doctor would go near—and, all but alone, ministering to the sufferers there. And after this I am in the presence of the greatest of the four—Josephine Butler—laying her white charity over the lost sisters of the streets, and wooing them in the name of Christ to a better life; and, grander still, in the interest of these lost ones, leaving her home to fulfil a task of unspeakable difficulty, to denounce a law that legalised vice, and in the face of coarse and brutal taunts—not always from men alone—to hold that law up to obloquy, till she compelled the world to listen, and Parliament to abolish the shame.

Christian work in England has been changed by the lives and deeds of those four ladies. Doors of homes rich in culture and means are opening daily now, and fair daughters stepping forth, leaving ease and luxury, and going forth on ministries of nursing and rescue. A consciousness such as never before existed in our social life is reminding us that we are our brother's keeper. The great conviction is working in many hearts that we are debtors to the poor and the heavy laden and them that are out of the way. The best lives of our best classes are pervaded by humane sympathies. Kindly hands take hold of homeless children on the streets, and lead them through doorways of virtuous and useful life. Criminals—who have no friends on earth—are met at the prison gate when their terms of punishment are ended, and entered on chances or new careers. A new, enlightened interest clusters around the suffering poor. Workmen caught in machinery, navies crushed under cruel wheels, shipbuilders falling from the scaffolding, poor mothers carrying new life under their hearts, but without beds to lie on, poor children who have fallen into the fire—they are cared for, they are visited in the hospitals daily. The visitors bring flowers to brighten the sad hours of the sufferer, and in their cheerful sympathy the fragrance of a summer better than flowers can show.

Many a time, in my study, I pause over my work to refresh my heart with the vision of these fair and saintly visitors going forth on their gracious ministries. I see them leaving their warm homes on winter days, facing forth through rain or snow—entering unattractive buildings—putting all signs of winter weather aside—clothing themselves with a holy brightness, with sisterly concern for the suffering—passing from bed to bed, dropping tender words of sympathy—repeating a verse of the Bible—and sometimes, like angels of the Divine presence, sitting by the bedside and singing hymns of cheerful songs to the weary sufferers. O, Divine compassion! what heavenly services it undertakes. It goes forth in the spirit of the King; its daughters are clothed in raiment richer than gold—they are clad with the pity and love of Him who laid His hand of healing on the miseries of our race!

(Concluded next week.)

British and Foreign.

UNITED PRESBYTERIAN SYNOD.

THE Synod of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, met in Edinburgh on Monday evening, May 5th. The retiring Moderator, Dr. Drummond, of Glasgow, preached from Acts xi. 24. Rev. James Fleming, of Withorn, was unanimously elected Moderator.

In presenting the report of the Committee on Bills and Overtures, Dr. Blair stated that the Committee took up a "Memorial" from members of the church disapproving of the action of Disestablishment and Disendowment Committee. It had been moved and seconded that the Memorial be transmitted, as it did not come through the recognized channels, and was contrary to the rules of the Church with regard to the transmission of documents. It had also been moved and seconded that though the Memorial had not been transmitted through the usual channels, it be transmitted to the Synod with an expression of the opinion of the Committee. On the vote being taken, it was found there was a majority not to transmit the "Memorial" to the Synod, and the Committee decided accordingly.

The report on Statistics presented by Rev. John Young, showed that the number of communicants had increased by 1,391, and congregational incomes by upwards of £10,000. The total income of the Synod was stated to be £83,142 as compared with £96,307 in the previous year.

A warm debate ensued on the condition of the Theological Hall on the report of the College Committee. On motion of Dr. Thomas Whitelaw, it was resolved to appoint a large and representative committee to travel over the whole question brought up by the overtures and in particular inquire into the present condition and working of the college, conferring as occasion may require with the Senate, College Committee and others, and to bring up to next Synod a detailed report, with recommendations.

The Foreign Mission Report showed the Fund to be in a more favourable position than for some years past. Income, £33,229. In the various fields they had a staff of 117 fully trained agents, of whom fifty-four were ordained European missionaries. The ninety-six congregations connected with the Mission had an aggregate membership of 14,899 with 755 candidates for admission. Since 1880 the membership had shown an average annual increase of 549.

The report of the Committee on Disestablishment affirmed that marked progress had been made during the past year. Politicians recognize in Disestablishment a question which can no longer be omitted from their councils, and the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland alive to the nearness of the crisis are preparing for dealing with it. In Scotland there were signs that the hour for the deliverance of the Church was at hand. A resolution disapproving of the policy pursued by the Committee was proposed by Rev. W. Barras, of Glasgow. Prof. Calderwood proposed a resolution asking the Synod to say that the Committee must in future refrain from intervention in political affairs without instruction from the committee's report was carried by an overwhelming majority.

Rev. B. Martin moved a resolution in favour of the abolition of State teaching of theology, and declared that it would be dangerous for the Church to give its sanction to the idea that under Chairs in the national universities there should be theology taught in a non-dogmatic way, because they did not know but that under the cover of non-dogmatic teaching some of their students, who ultimately would come into their halls, might be taught matters which would be very detrimental to their interests. Dr. Oliver, of Glasgow, seconded Mr. Martin's motion. The debate that ensued was taken part in by Professor Calderwood, Principal Cairns, Dr. Whitelaw and Dr. Hutton, of whom the three latter spoke in favour of Mr. Martin's motion, which was carried by a large majority.

Overtures in favour of cultivating closer relations with the Free Church were considered. Rev. John Smith proposed a resolution expressing devout gratitude for the co-operation to which the overtures referred, commending to the notice of the other Presbyteries of the Church the desirability of such co-operation, authorizing the Home Board, or a committee of the Board, to meet with any similar committee which the Free Church Assembly might appoint for these purposes, and to report progress to next Synod. In seconding, Principal Cairns said he trusted the time was not far distant for incorporating union. In hastening the union, let them make the atmosphere of cordiality between the two Churches warmer and warmer. The motion was carried unanimously, and a copy was ordered to be sent to the Clerk of the Free Church General Assembly.

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ANOTHER NEW LIST OF HOME REFERENCES: GEO. NICHOLSON, Zephyr, Ont., rheumatism 10 years, after two days resumed work in the harvest field. HENRY WHITE, Markham, Ont., rheumatism, shoulders and knees, cured after doctoring ten years. WM. DRINKWATER, V.S., Dutton, Ont., a martyr to rheumatism, cured in three weeks. MRS. MCKAY, Ailsa Craig, N.W.T., piles and complete prostration completely cured. JAS. STORY, Fitzroy, Ont., after wearing Buttery's Belt one night, attended a fair; a walking advertisement for us—70 years old. W. J. GOULD, Bathurst St., City, after having off 3 weeks went to work wore Buttery's Belt 4 days—cured. GEO. H. BALKLEY, Yarmouth, Ont., a cripple from rheumatism, liver and kidney, completely cured in one month. MRS. WALTER LUNN, Port Talbot, Ont., not able to work for 1 1/2 years, cured in one month, lame back and liver complaint. JOSIAH FENNELL, 287 Queen St. East, for 6 weeks could not write a letter, went to work on the sixth day—neuritis. F. FLOYD, 1191 Portland St., cured against his will, liver and kidney trouble. FLORENCE O'NEILL, Pakenham, neuritis, cured in four days, doctors could do nothing more for her. MISS FLORIE McDONALD, 21 Wilton Ave., reports a lump drawn from her wrist. RICHARD FLOOD, 40 Stewart St., tried everything for catarrh, Action cured him. L. D. GOOD, Berlin, Ont., cheerfully recommends Action for catarrh. T. R. JOHNSON, Solgirth, Man., tried a hundred remedies, nothing effected. Buttery's Belt cured biliousness and dyspepsia. SENATOR A. E. BOTSFORD, Sackville, N.H., says Action is good for defective eye sight. THOMAS GUTHRIE, Argyle, Man., received more good from our Buttery's Belt and Suspensory than from the best cure he paid for in twelve years.

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