

they have few means of helping one another. Many a mother has longed to give her sickly child some simple luxury, which, simple as it is, is beyond her means. Many a poor child has sighed because unable to get some trivial relief to help a dying parent. Poverty comes against people at every turn in life. It takes a hundred forms of misery, which only those who have been poor themselves, or who visit the poor, can realize.

And it was especially a trouble among the early Christians. Many a man was dismissed from office, simply because he became a Christian. For his Master he lost the means of obtaining his daily bread. Such a man could realize the Lord's Prayer as the wealthy never could realize it. He gave up the world, the wicked heathen world to trust his Lord, and day after day, night after night, there went up the cry from a sorrowful heart, "Give us this day our daily bread."

This accounts for the frequent collections that we read of in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles on behalf of the "poor saints." And such there were in Smyrna, "I know thy tribulation and poverty."

And for this reason the Lord encouraged the Church there by pointing to His own ignominious death (which involved His poverty), and to the glorious life which followed it. "Thus saith He that was dead and is alive, I know thy tribulation and poverty, but," He adds, in a little parenthesis of great significance, "thou art rich,"—"rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him" (James ii. 5). How can the poor be rich? How can the rich be poor? This problem is solved by the Gospel. It is true of congregations, it is true of individuals. The country missionary ministers sometimes to people in log buildings, without an altar, without a pulpit, with rude benches stretched on logs of wood for seats, the wind blowing through cracks in the walls, and yet sometimes there is more spiritual warmth there than in the grand Church with vaulted roof and painted window, artistic singing and cushioned pews. Sometimes one is forced to think that the comforts in our churches are so great that the Christianity in them is losing that sturdy character which it ought to have. Is it not true that, too often (there are noble exceptions), the wealthy Church is characterized by selfishness. Men of wealth sometimes argue against foreign and even domestic Mission on the ground that there is work enough to be done at home; and yet, when it is well looked into, the work that they do at home is painfully small—but little or nothing, it may be, beyond the paying of pew-rent. Whatever advantages may be claimed for the pew-rent system, its tendency certainly is to foster selfishness. It has been contrary to the old injunction, "Be careful to entertain strangers."

On the other hand there are Churches that are poor, whose seats are free: there is a welcome for everyone; their contributions are small indeed, but then they are large compared with their means, and the Saviour says, "I know thy poverty, but thou art rich."

And this is true also of individuals. Would a man who has found Christ precious to his soul change places with an unbeliever or a man of open sin, however great wealth he might have. No, more gladly would he lie on his hard bed, and content himself with meagre food, with Christ near to warm his heart, than take all the wealth of the Indies without Him. Though poor, with Christ he is rich.

But poverty was not the only cross which the early Christians had to bear. They had to face the contumely and ridicule of their enemies. "There goes a Nazarene." "There goes a Galilean." "There goes a Christ-ian." These were all words of reproach for the poor believer in Jesus, and he had to bear them all with meekness. And amongst their most bitter assailants were the Jews. "I know," says the Saviour, "I know the blasphemy of those that say they are Jews but are not, but are the Synagogue of Satan." "No true Jews are these," says Christ. "They persecuted Me and crucified Me. They say they are Jews and are not."

How different all this from the little banter which believers in Jesus sometimes are now called upon to endure! And yet there are those who shrink even from that. They will not suffer even a trifle for Christ's sake, who bore so much for them.

We have, however, to move on another step in this message to the Church of Smyrna.

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

These words were too ominous to be mistaken. There was trouble brewing for the Church of Smyrna. It is treated with sweet tenderness. Not a word of reproach or blame, only a warning to be faithful under the most cruel sufferings, imprisonment and death itself. "Ye shall have tribulation ten days." The expression "days," in Scripture frequently means "years." Probably it does so here, and ten years was the exact period of the persecution of Diocletian, one of the most bloody persecutions ever stirred up against the Christians. And Smyrna may have been called upon to suffer more than ordinary tribulation. Perhaps the magistrates were more inhuman; perhaps the mob was more fierce; perhaps the cruelty was more intense. The message to her was this, "Be thou faithful, faithful unto death."

And history tells us that this poor, despised Church of Smyrna was very true to her Lord under the most cruel forms of martyrdom. We