

face and for a longer time, and there may be a prolonged effort, equal to a concentrated effort, in taking up from day to day the cross.

Whatever in our daily life is perplexed and irksome and galling; the unfavourable outward circumstances with which we may deem ourselves undeservedly surrounded; the monotony of an uncongenial pursuit; the mortifications and deprivations of our social life,—whatever is the drawback or the shadow on our lives,—this is to us a cross, and it must be taken up. It is that *crook in the lot* of which good divines have written. In reading the experience of God's saints, we see again and again how this arises. One man suffers from a life-long neglect, or misrepresentation, or calumny. Another is for ever under the burden of poverty. Another is for ever under the burden of ill-health. Another is under the burden of multiplied responsibilities and anxieties, with which he is but little able to cope. It often also becomes an additional element in the unhappiness, that we have brought these unfavourable circumstances upon ourselves. The cross has been our own making. It is less the divine will than our own perverted will which has brought it upon us. But even here there is the consolation, that if these things have not been expressly brought about, they have, at least, been permitted, by the providence of God, and, in the wonderful workings of that providence, will be overruled to our own ultimate good and to the divine glory. But in whatever way brought and imposed, here is the cross which these circumstances constitute; and this being the case, when we recognise the cross, it is our wisdom and our duty to take it up, and so to follow Christ.

But take the case where, almost palpably and visibly, the cross is laid upon us; as when our days are darkened by the death of one we love, or when a long or incurable illness becomes our lot. Then plainly, and without any disguise, the cross is laid upon us. These are not complex and mysterious events, in which we may be at a loss to recognize the divine hand, but we see the direct and immediate work of God. Here we have a manifest call to submission, with prayer for divine support and consolation.

The denying of ourselves daily seems to be the minor degree of which the taking up the cross is the greater. Day by day we shall find both—the constant opening for self-denial, the absolute necessity in the divine

life for taking up the cross. The Christian must bear it meekly, submissively, enduringly, remembering the Master's words, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me."

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION.—'Reconciling the world.' Mark the liberality of the expression. Mark its comprehensiveness. Reconciling the world. As I said before, the apostle did not perplex himself practically in the vain attempt to arrive at definite, logically-bounded conceptions on those deep things of God, touching election and the like, on which much unprofitable discussion has often been bestowed, and which probably in this world will never be unravelled. His view was that God's object was to reconcile the world—Jew and Gentile—all men everywhere. People should be diffident in their judgments on such high matters as the decrees of the Almighty, and should remember the great possibility of error, the absolute impossibility of perfect knowledge, in regard to them. But people need not be diffident in holding that all men are invited to become partakers in the benefits of redemption. Our faculties go far enough to enable us to see quite clearly that that is what the Scriptures say in the most distinct terms, and the principle they always go upon even when it is not expressed. "God will have all men to be saved;" so it is written, and the same thing is written in other words in a hundred other passages, and I do not believe that it is written only because we do not know who the elect are, or, in other words, who those are whom God will have to be saved; but I believe it is written because it is the simple truth; and I believe therefore I am to preach Christ to you freely, because Christ is free—to you all, because it is the honest fact that He is offered to you all, and not for the mere reason that one cannot tell to whom. But the apostle adds something more, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, *not imputing unto men their trespasses.*" This passage has nothing to do with the doctrine of imputation as held by some theologians. It has nothing to do with the imputation of either Adam's sin or of Christ's righteousness. It is not any other person's sin that the Apostle is saying God will not impute. He is saying that God was in Christ, not imputing to men their own sins; that is, not dealing with them as sinners, not dealing with them as for their sins they deserved, but shewing them undeserved kindness and forbearance. The meaning is the same as that of the passage in St. John, "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." This is what we are to preach with the most perfect freedom. This is the gospel of the kingdom we are to proclaim. This is the ministry of reconciliation with which the apostle and his fellow-labourers were put in charge, with which his successors in the preaching office are put in charge still.—*Sermons and Expositions by the late Dr. John Robertson.*