

Our Contributors.

For Dominion Presbyterian.

The Blessed Strait and the Willing Sacrifice.

2.—The Willing Sacrifice.

The apostle, though to depart was his preference, was willing for the good of others to forego the immediate enjoyment that death he knew would bring to him. What a contrast this to the thoughts and feelings of many, or, we may say, of most! Voltaire, who, we may presume, was ignorant of everything in the Bible except what afforded him material for scoffing and who especially had not the slightest knowledge of the apostle's frame of mind in regard to friends, says, "I hate life and I dread death." The contrast is complete. He too was in a strait, but a strait the very reverse of Paul's; and that because his views of life and death were the reverse of Paul's. Paul did not dread death, but desired it, because trusting in Christ he knew that it would be his entrance into a higher life. But while he desired death he did not hate life. On the contrary, he loved and valued it. As his Christian views of death were such that he did not dread it but desired it, so his Christian views of life were such that he valued it as giving him opportunity to glorify Christ and to serve His people. And accordingly he expresses his confidence that he shall continue with his converts for a time to be useful to them by his services and his sufferings. How he came to that confidence—whether by strong presentiment from what he saw, or whether by Divine inspiration, we cannot know. Nor is it of any consequence that we should know. What is to us instructive and exemplary is that he was more than content to be debared for a time from a state which in his estimation was as to the personal enjoyment "far better" than the present at its best, and which was therefore the object of his desire. Though he had no prospect but that of suffering—of "bonds and afflictions abiding him in every city" he might visit, Acts. 20. 13, he shrank not from it in view of his serving the cause of Christ and promoting the welfare of the "household of faith" and of his fellowmen, as he had opportunity. Elsewhere he says, "I endure all things for the Elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory," manifesting the very mind of Christ who "though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor."

Alas! How it is forgotten that self-denial for the good of others is the first lesson of practical Christianity. Leave out Christ as our Redeemer and our great example, and regard life as a season given to scramble for the world and to practise self-indulgence; and it will be wretched failure, "vanity and vexation of spirit," and in the end we shall have to say, "I hate life, and I dread death." But if we aim at copying Christ, as Paul did, ours will be the happiest of lives attainable here, with no prospect in death but what is infinitely desirable. But who really believes this? Surely not very many. Yet we feel sure that the number is daily increasing of those who are not dominated by the desire to make the most of the life that now is, without a thought of the life that is beyond.

Let us not omit taking note of the fact that the apostle was conscious of his own usefulness. He was aware that the spiritual welfare of others depended on him. Such knowledge is in full consistency with the humility which is the distinguishing grace of the Christian. It is an affected and false humility for a man to deny or depreciate the abilities or the gifts with which God has en-

dowed him, or the success with which God has honoured his exercise of them. It is true, the right-minded Christian will acknowledge that God is the author of his gifts, and that it is to Him that his success in the exercise of them is to be ascribed. Paul had, more than others, a deep sense of his own unworthiness and ill desert and of his insufficiency and nothingness. But he could not but know his own usefulness as an instrument of good to others. "By the grace of God," he says, "I am what I am," and, "I laboured more abundantly than any of them," (not than *all* of them, as in the A. V., considering the difference of idiom.) "yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." Accordingly he does not scruple to speak of the independence of their spiritual welfare on his "abiding with them." He knew indeed that God could and would further their spiritual welfare should he be removed or without any labour of his. But it was his happiness and joy to be himself the instrument not only in the conversion of sinners but in the building up of believers, or as he expresses it "for their furtherance and joy of faith," or that their faith should be so furthered that they should have joy in their religion, or be joyful Christians. If the apostle especially mentions *faith*, it is not to the exclusion of other graces, but because it is necessary to the maintenance and furtherance of every Christian virtue—the mother of all the graces, even as love is the queen of them all. The apostle knew that their progress in all good depended on their faith or their believing. Nor was he satisfied with being assured that they were really and truly believers in Christ, as if, being in a state of safety, there needed to be no further concern in relation to them. He knew that they needed to have their faith increased; that they should have clearer views of the truth; that they should have firmer hold of it; that they should be more under its influence; and that they should have that joy of faith which is the strength of the believer, Neh. 8. 10; that they should "be filled with all joy and peace in believing," Rom. 14. 13.

There are, we believe, many Christians to whom it is a matter of no little distressing uneasiness of mind that they are not able to say with Paul that they have a "desire to depart." There are even some who will question their spiritual state because they cannot express themselves with the confidence of the apostle in relation to his departure. To such we would say, if the apostle's frame of mind is what you have not attained you know it is attainable by those who desire to attain it. And if you ask how it may be attained, our answer is, by your having such views of life and death as the apostle had—Christian views. Only then, but surely then, you will be in the same blessed strait as he was, neither hating life nor dreading death, but looking forward to death with desire, yet valuing life and willing to continue for good to others. You know, of course, that everyone who has a saving interest in Christ has solid ground for being in the blessed strait. But you say your interest in Christ is very questionable. You see much that makes you question it. Be it so. Yet you are *concerned*—are you not?—to be in this blessed frame, and to die as a Christian. For if so, the way to the attainment of this best of frames is open and plain. Christ invited your trust. He invited you as sinners—even as the chief of sinners—who have destroyed yourself, who have forfeited life and incurred perdition, to "look to him," "to come to him," that is, to believe in Him or trust Him as "the lamb of God which

taketh away the sin of the world," and as your own Saviour who died for you and rose again, "that whether you live or die you might live together with him," 1 Thess. 5. 10. He invited you to fellowship with Him. He proposes to dwell with you. He says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock; to me if any man will open, I will come in and sup with him, and he with me," Rev. 3. 20. Only admit Him therefore; and be careful to cultivate fellowship with Him, avoiding all that would hinder it. Separate yourself from the world in its unchristian ways and be near to God in prayer and in the faithful use of His Word and ordinances, making it your aim to "follow the steps" of Christ. Be this your aim, and with all your shortcomings, mistakes and failures, you may expect to experience when you most need it a tranquility, if not a joy, in the prospect of death to which most are strangers.

But what shall we say to those who not only have no Christian views of life and death, but have no serious thought of either—who, made for the highest ends in relation to God and to their fellowmen, leave out Christ and live in consequence on a level scarcely above that of the beasts that perish incapable, to all appearance, of pursuing higher ends than those that concern the indulgence of bodily appetites? To such we say again, leave out Christ and regard the present life as the season of personal indulgence and of scrambling to make the most of the present world in the accumulation of wealth, or in the attainment of any object of human desire, and as sure as you do your life will be a miserable failure. It is only the want of even a little consideration that prevents you seeing this. You cannot entertain one serious thought without feeling that, being without Christ, you are without any good hope in relation to the future that awaits you. It may be that, though living without Christ, you still persuade yourselves that you can and surely will avail yourselves of Him before you die. But the more you cherish it, the more surely will the persuasion fail you when you most need it. It may be that the arch-deceiver, unless you repel him in his hellish endeavor to settle you in the presumptuous persuasion of your security, will in righteous retribution be permitted to have such a power over you in the dying hour that your death shall be one of despair of God's mercy. We have a compassionate, considerate and all-sufficient Saviour to deal with—one who "knows our frame and remembers that we are dust." If men would only "consider their ways," all would be well; but, as the Lord complains by the word of another prophet, "His people," that is, in name and profession and obligation, "doth not consider," and nothing will persuade them to be "wise for themselves" in "considering their latter end," Deut. 32. 29, and they "die as fools for want of wisdom," Prov. 10. 21.

Forel and Lubbock estimated that a large anthill contained as many as half a million ants. M. Yung, being skeptical of these figures, has lately made an actual count, killing by means of poisonous vapor, the ants in five immense hills. On counting the dead, he found that the largest hill contained no more than 100,000 insects.

It has long been held that coal, when wet, is more likely to take fire in storage, but Professor Threlfall watched two bins for sixty days. The one containing wet coal reached a temperature of only 35° Centigrade, while that containing dry coal reached 200° Centigrade, and was just on the point of spontaneous combustion.