

ON THE NEED OF SIMPLE WORDS.

IT is often a startling revelation to educated persons to discover what extraordinary misconceptions exist in the minds of the illiterate as to the meanings of words and phrases which to them seem clear and free from ambiguity. The *Church Times* has the following remarks on this topic, called forth by a proposal made by the Bishop of Lichfield, that steps be taken to set up, as it were, elementary schools of piety. "For years and years we have been urging the necessity of preaching to people in language which they can understand, and it is a fact that persons of ordinary education have no conception how many of the expressions they use are Greek to those of less than ordinary attainments. Some suppose that it is only big words that are stumbling-blocks, but it is quite possible for monosyllables to puzzle not the poor only, but persons of a station above them. Thus the *Literary Churchman* gives an instance which we think contains not only much food for reflection, but a complete justification of Bishop Maclagan's idea, if not his actual proposal.

I remember telling a worthy farmer in Somersetshire of the absurd way in which an old body in an adjoining parish had misinterpreted my text, and I should imagine misunderstood the whole drift of my sermon, preached the Sunday previous, to a gathering of volunteers. "What was the text, sir?" said my friend. "Quit you like men," I replied, and she fancied that the whole sermon was based on the precept that they were to "quick march like men!" "How foolish!" said my friend, the farmer. "Of course everyone hereabouts knows the meaning of 'quit.' 'Quit your farm,' notice to quit, and so on. What you meant was, go out of church like men, quit you like men, for in some places they makes an awful noise!"

It seems to us that this too popular ignorance of the meaning of words should be studied scientifically; in other words that an attempt should be made by persons who are really conversant with the laboring classes to tabulate erroneous ideas which the uneducated form as to the meaning of words which educated persons might think could not be misunderstood. Instances have been given in these columns of the odd manner in which children corrupt the text of hymns and catechisms; such, for example, as "The sea and all the tinamies," and that amazing version of Doddridge's Advent hymn—"He gave some brass before He burst." We may add another. Many years ago, while some school children were singing a ditty out of the old Mitre Hymn-book, which contained the lines—

In vain the watch, the seal, the guard
Forbid the Lord to rise.

The mayor of a great municipal town whispered to us—"I remember that when I was a child I used to wonder whose watch and sea's and watch-guard were meant, and what they could possibly have had to do with it!" A list of children's blunders would be useful to teachers and catechists, but after all they are not of

much real account, for juvenile mistakes soon get corrected, but the misapprehensions of adults are likely to be permanent; and a collection containing a few scores of them would seem like a revelation to numbers of our clergy and even of our missionaries."

We can speak from personal knowledge of several instances as gross as the above. The present rector of a Church at Southsea, when a curate in Birmingham, met with a poor woman in his parish who was a bigoted Primitive Methodist. Her great cry against the Church was because the clergy were learned. The curate gently suggested that this was not a valid objection inasmuch as St. Paul was a learned man, "you know," said he, "that he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel." The good woman snapped out this reply instantly: "What's that got to do with it, St. Paul was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and Gamaliel," (pronouncing it Gammerlyel) "is only a mountain near Jerusalem." The curate was of course staggered at such ignorance in one who was a daily reader of the Bible, but it opened his eyes to the fact that the most elementary Biblical truths frequently are utterly misconceived for lack of a little instruction in what not being "spiritual" knowledge, is too often neglected. We could give other like instances. In the pulpit, in visiting, in class instruction, it is highly advisable to remember how very limited is the literary knowledge of the great mass of our people, so that instruction may be given in such words, and with such explanations as will convey clear ideas to those who are being taught. Sunday school teachers who never test their work by questioning pupils as to their understanding of the meanings of words would be amazed were they to enter upon this work. They would find a field for cultivation which would repay all their labor in examining their classes on word meanings, and would find their own minds enriched by the exercise of opening out such meanings in language comprehensible by the young.

ACTING ON PRINCIPLE.

IT is a very curious thing that people, as a rule, and an almost invariable rule, act by party or sentiment, and not by principle. The mere following the lead of this or that society or man which happens to be a society or which chances to be a man of eminence, is rotten in the extreme; it is surely mere laziness for people who have brains to make use of these experts to think for them when great matters of principle are on the carpet, although they are quite right in considering carefully their decisions. The thing that needs especially pressing upon people at the present day is the duty of honestly having a principle, and as honestly sticking to it, and this by themselves. There is surely no occasion for them to hang on to another man's coat tails and following where he leads, if they would only take the trouble to think, using, of course, every means to qualify them for arriving at a right conclusion, and being ready to acknowledge an error if they happen, either from im-

perfect knowledge of facts, or from lack of judgment, to have gone wrong.

It is, of course, as we have above indicated, quite reasonable and right for people to take advantage of the superior knowledge of others in order to help them to form a right judgment, but what we wish to impress upon them is that each person is responsible for his own opinion upon this or that matter, and that as he has been gifted by God with brains of some sort, he is bound to use them, and if he has educated those brains properly—that is, if he has acted as a Christian man and done his best with such gifts, then they will probably serve him truly, and lead him fairly right. It is with the brain as it is with the conscience, and it is with the conscience as it is with a watch. If it be well attended to and treated with delicacy and care, it will, as a rule, guide a man pretty straight. But each man ought to have a very distinct principle as the foundation of all his thoughts and actions, or else he is nowhere when any time of trial comes.

Principle must be based on knowledge. A principle which is merely the outcome of feeling is of no use at all. Mere feeling and sentiment is about the most useless power that exists. It is, no doubt, showy, and may last for a certain time, and perhaps do some good work temporarily on an emergency, but beyond this it is of very little use. There is no really lasting power in it. What is required in Church politics is something solid, based upon solid principle—not built upon the sand, but built upon a Rock, and that Rock is Christ, and His doctrine and truth. Both among High Churchmen and Low Churchmen the motive power which causes not a few of them to act is sectarianism and not principle.

Let us strike another chord, and take the question of general almsgiving. We have endeavoured to show that people are responsible for the use which they make of the brains with which they have been gifted, and the knowledge which they happen to possess.

Take, as we said, the question of almsgiving, and view it in relation to the matter of principle which we are now dealing with. As a rule, principle is entirely lost sight of in matters of so-called "charity," and sentiment is allowed to take its place. A great deal of money is given away out of sheer laziness and lack of moral courage. A person asks a friend to contribute to this or that object, and the friend simply gives his five or ten shillings, although he knows nothing about the particulars and object for which it is asked, and indeed may not have any sympathy with it. He gives the money just because it is easier to give it than to make inquiry as to how it is to be expended, and because it is more pleasant, or perhaps less unpleasant, to mulet himself of the money than to say to his friend that he had rather give the sum to something else which he knew more about, and in which he had more personal interest.

What we contend for, then, is that people who profess to be actuated by Christian principles should try to be Christians all round, and not only on Sundays in church, and in relation

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