

The Christian.

ST. JOHN. N. B., . . . MARCH, 1896.

EDITORIAL.

THE OLD AND THE NEW.

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge that one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they that live should no longer live to themselves, but unto him who, for their sakes, died and rose again.

Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh; even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold they are become new. But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. II Cor. v. 14-19. R. V.

We are here called to consider the things of God; first, the old things, then the new. With us the new things come first, then the old. The sad thought that the new things we most highly prize are growing older and older till they pass away mingles with and mars our happiness over the new. Even the life we all prize so much is destined like a vapor to vanish away.

But with God the old comes first, then the new. This is especially true with his dispensations of mercy. All these dispensations were of God; the old passing away and the new abiding, affording the children of God ever-increasing consolation.

When Paul the aged and a prisoner of Jesus Christ plead his own case before King Agrippa and Festus and their gay companions, his cheerful countenance and affectionate and earnest defence of the religion he once strove to destroy, but which had now brought upon him chains and imprisonment, led Festus to think it impossible for a sane man, in his circumstances, to be so joyful and so anxious for others to embrace that religion. He had not an accusation for his persecutors, nor a murmur at his lot, showed no fear of the bonds and imprisonments that he was sure awaited him; but, lifting his chained hands and pointing his hearers first to the cross and then to the crown, no man in that audience was as happy as he.

Many besides Festus reckoned the apostles mad, but he here explains the matter to his brethren. If we be beside ourselves, it is to God, for from him flows all our fervor. But if we speak sober truth, it is for your sakes, to enlighten and strengthen you in your struggles for Christ and heaven. We are not fanatics, but the love of Christ constrains us in our benevolent work—a work as reasonable as it is benevolent, for we thus judge if one died for all, one so far above all others, whose life was his own, freely gave up that life for all, the ends of law and justice were better served than if all had died for their own sins; and he died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him that died for their sakes and rose again.

The death of Christ was the line which divided the old and new things of God, the old and new covenants. The basis of the

old covenant was the flesh of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. All their children were in it. Christ himself was in it. Six hundred years before, God, by Jeremiah found fault with it, calling it the old, and promising to make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. (Jer. xxxi. 31-34).

That old fleshly dispensation lasted till it had given to the world the flesh of the Son of God, and when "the body of his flesh" was broken on the cross, it ceased; so the apostles "henceforth" started at the cross. From that time we know no man after the flesh, or as a Jew. Though we have known Christ after the flesh, or as a Jew in the fleshly dispensation, yet now we know him so no more. He was the Son of Abraham and the Son of David, but it was as the Son of Man that he was lifted up on the cross, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John iii. 14). The new and living way which Jesus consecrated for us was through the veil, that is to say his flesh, and all men everywhere are graciously urged by "the Son of Man," their brother, to enter through it into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. (Heb. x. 19, 20).

Three facts claim our earnest attention:

- I. God reconciled the apostles to himself through Christ.
- II. He gave to the apostles the ministry of reconciliation.
- III. What God did by the apostolic ministry.

I. God reconciled the apostles to himself by Christ. Man is an enemy to God of the worst kind, an enemy by wicked works. His heart and life are opposed to God and his ways and law. He is selfish and likes his own ways, but hates God's ways and God's will. He is afraid to think of God, and regards him as an enemy who intends to punish him. God destroys this enmity, changes his views and heart and desires, so that he loves God and his ways, his people and his services. The Holy Spirit convinces him of his sins and of God's infinite love to sinners like himself, by showing him that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. He is thus reconciled to God by the death of his Son. His death on the cross destroys his enmity. Every one of the apostles was an enemy to God, but he reconciled him to himself.

But God employs a man to tell these enemies the good news, and to persuade them to be reconciled. Such a man is called the spiritual father of those he thus persuades, "How shall they hear without a preacher," etc. Now if Peter were asked who was his spiritual father, he would name no mere man. If James and John and every one of the eleven were asked the same question, they would all give the same answer,— "Jesus Christ was the minister who told us all about God's love and God's salvation, and who persuaded us to be saved." So God reconciled every one of the apostles to him-

self by the preaching of Christ, as well as by virtue of his atonement.

When the devoted women who first saw their risen Lord told the good news to the apostles, they regarded it as idle tales, and believed them not. When the ten apostles told Thomas that they had actually seen and handled and talked with the risen Lord, Thomas would not believe till he had himself seen him. No one but Jesus himself need go to Saul of Tarsus. So it could be said of every one of the apostles that God had reconciled them to himself by the ministry of Christ.

II. God gave these apostles the ministry of reconciliation. They had charge of this great work of God. They were the stewards of his manifold grace. He committed this treasure to earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of them. Should any question from then till the end of time arise about God's plan of saving sinners, or what he required of them, it was to be decided by these stewards of the mysteries of God. What were the apostles told to do and how did they do it? was to be the infallible rule. Each of them had seen the Lord, and they declared to men what they had seen and heard, and what he had told them to say. They were Christ's ambassadors; as if God did beseech the people by them they urged the people, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God.

III. What God did by the Apostolic ministry. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses. What can we say of this grand passage, but as we read and re-read it, ask over and over, Is this what is meant by the ministry of reconciliations? Does God in every deed reconcile the world to himself? The world has many sinners in it and crimes of deepest dye. Does God reconcile all kinds of sinners to himself? Yes, he was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their sins.

Paul called himself the chief of sinners, because he had wasted the church and murdered its members. Yet God reconciled Paul unto himself, not reckoning to him his trespasses. When the apostolic ministry was first inaugurated, God in one day reconciled three thousand to himself, and among these were the very murderers of his beloved Son. Yet he did not reckon unto them their trespasses.

Jesus tells us of the prodigal's return to his father, who ran to meet him and fell on his neck and kissed him. He began to tell his crimes, but was stopped by his father, who would neither hear nor reckon to him his trespasses. He was altogether absorbed in the return of a dearly beloved and long lost son. He is alive and home again, and locked in each others arms with heart throbbing to heart was the time for grand rejoicing and for sinking forever all past trespasses. So, says Jesus, there is rejoicing among the angels over one sinner that repents. O that a lost world knew the meaning of the ministry of reconciliation which God committed to the apostles.