

CRUCIFYING THE FLESH.

A SERMON

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‘They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh.’ GAL. v. 24

THE soul of man is like a garden, in which weeds and briars, thorns and brambles, grow in wild and tangled confusion;—unprofitable plants which the Lord hath not planted, and which are to be rejected and burned. Here and there amidst this useless growth appears a fairer form—a rich fruit, or a beautiful plant, which seems to tell of a better state of things in days gone by, of a higher culture lost, and of the possibility that the whole garden might still be retrieved, and might be made fruitful and pleasant.

The culture of this garden—the work of Divine grace in the soul—is of a twofold nature, which we may not improperly distinguish as negative and positive. Negatively, there is the removal of what is evil; positively, there is the implantation of what is good. There is, on the one hand, the rooting up of what is noxious or unprofitable; on the otherhand the planting of what is useful and beautiful. There is the rooting up—the stubbing up, as we might more correctly say—of the thorn and the brier, and there is the planting of the fir-tree and the myrtle-tree, and all the other trees of righteousness; so that the tangled wilderness, first cleared of its foul growth, may afterwards become fragrant as Sharon and fruitful as Carmel.

This is the twofold manifestation of the Divine life in the soul of man. These are the two forms which the work of sanctification assumes—the removal of the evil, and the implantation of the good—the decay and destruction of the old nature, and the uprising and growth of the new.

The text refers to the first branch or division of this Divine life, and of this only. The present discourse, therefore, will not present a complete view of this work of grace in the soul, but of one side of it only, and that the negative side. Let us then occupy our thoughts together concerning the removal of evil, the decay and destruction of the old man, the withering of the plants of bitterness, the crucifixion of the carnal mind.

Perhaps the expression made use of by St. Paul in our text will be found better adapted than most others to help us to clear views upon this vitally important matter. We are to be crucified together with Christ, or as the apostle elsewhere expresses it, “planted together in the likeness of His death.” That which is to be crucified is the old self, the carnal mind; “our old man,” says the same apostle, “is crucified with Him, that the body might be destroyed. This cruci-

fixion Paul elsewhere represents as having taken place actually in his own person, “I am crucified with Christ”; and believers are commanded to “mortify,” that is—for the original etymological sense of the word mortify has now grown obsolete—to “put to death their members which are upon the earth.” In like manner St. Peter declares that whosoever “hath suffered in the flesh,” after the pattern of the crucified Lord, “hath ceased from sin,” where the crucifying of the flesh and the ceasing from sin are represented as identical. Nor is this to be considered as an optional matter, or as a singular height of sanctity. On the contrary, it is described in Holy Writ as being the usual estate of those who are in Christ; for we can no more escape the cross, if we would win the crown, than our Master could. It is thus St. Paul represents it, summing up the whole in two or three words—“They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh.”

But you may ask, “What is it that is to be crucified? It certainly cannot mean our bodies, after the literal pattern of our Lord Christ. What are we precisely to understand by ‘the flesh,’ which, it is here stated, those who are Christ’s must crucify?”

The reply, my brethren, is at hand. As the tree is known by its fruits, so the flesh may be known by its works. In a previous paragraph St. Paul states that “the works of the flesh” are plain to all, not needing, like the more hidden fruits of the Spirit, to be educated and specified: “the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like, of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” These are the outward works or manifestations, known and obvious to all, known by the common conscience of mankind more or less to be sinful, condemned by moralists, and inexcusable by ourselves,

if our conscience be in unperturbed and healthy action.

But we want to go deeper than this. For it is not the works, but the worker, which is to be crucified. Where then are we to find the doer of these things—what is the source whence these evils proceed? From the depravity of the heart, from our innate tendency to evil, says a theologian. To whom we reply, Your answer is correct as far as it goes, but it does not adequately meet this case; for we cannot, except in a very shadowy and metaphorical sense, crucify a principle or a tendency. Still less does the Scripture authorise us to attribute these evils exclusively to the devil. Satan and his angels undoubtedly foster and promote these evil works by means of their subtle arts; but they are not the real actors, the true workers of them.



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