THE HIGHER LIFE A CONSTRAINING LOVE

BY C. H. FOWLER, D.D., LL.D.

THERE are many elements that enter into the Christian character. It is impossible to tell which are the chief ones, for if we examine each with critical care we find it an integral in relation to all the rest. Even those which would at first seem to possess only a subordinate value develop great interest and importance the more closely we inspect them. Like the stones in a vast temple, even the smallest can be as little spared as the largest. Each has its worth toward the harmony and integrity of the whole superstructure.

The place which the doctrines and traditions of our holy faith have assigned to love is by no means subordinate. If any one can claim supremacy above all else, it is love—the constraining love of Christ toward His disciple, and the constraining love of the disciple toward his Master. Like the root which supports the oak, love must underlie all outward progress and development. It is the source of the two great classes of duties, the passive and the active. There are periods in the life of the Church when those who love Christ must bear and suffer, rather than take the initiative and aggressive.

In the primitive and apostolic period there was a singular connection of the two. There was persecution of the bitterest character, and those who loved Christ were compelled to leave home, and friends, and property, and life itself. Christian life was one long passion, until death changed it to a victory. But there was, at the same time, a large measure of the aggressive and active. In the first three centuries there was a progress of evangelization, a seizing upon new territory and new peoples, an organization of Christian societies, a growth of apostolic literature—which are simply amazing; and we are left in doubt which to admire the most, the love which suffered or the love which wrought. But in either case it was love—a restless, impelling, constraining love.

And this impulsion is the infallible test of love to Christ. It