

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

DOING THE WILL OF GOD.

ADDRESS AT MEETING OF WOMAN'S FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETY,
AT PETERBOROUGH, BY MRS. D. GORDON, OF HARRINGTON.

By self-will, Primeval Paradise was lost. By self-renunciation and loving subjection to the will of God on the part of our Saviour, Paradise was regained. A like self-renunciation and subjection to God's will, in our hearts and lives, is the condition of our fellowship with Him in His accepted service, and future reward. This condition the Lord Himself indicates in words of surpassing power and sweetness. The words have suggested a few thoughts, which I with much diffidence offer for your attention this morning. They are these: "Behold my mother and my brethren; for whosoever shall do the will of My Father in heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother." They were spoken by Him as He sat teaching in the midst of the multitudes in Capernaum, and we discern an undertone of sadness in the inquiry, Who is My mother? and who are My brethren? He is pressed by the fickle crowd, less eager, it may be, to hear His doctrine than to see His miracles—pained by the bold blasphemies of scribes and Pharisees, and wounded by the irritating officiousness of unbelieving kinsfolk. His human heart turns to its rest in the loyal love of the little circle of disciples around Him, as He indicates them with tenderly eloquent gesture—"Behold My mother and My brethren." These words of Christ bear on our work as a society as to the way in which we should do it, and the honour with which it is connected. We can glance only at the first of these. Our model in the doing of the will of God is the Lord Himself.

He did it in the spirit of self-renunciation and loving subjection. He took upon Him the form of a servant; He was made under law; witness the obscurity, the toil, the poverty, the subjection of the silent years at Nazareth. In this attitude of subjection He foiled the tempter in the wilderness, persisting in waiting for His Father's supply for His need, as if He held no reserve of power in Himself; in the second temptation persisting in rejecting the way to the Messianic crown suggested by the tempter, and in choosing His Father's way, though He well knew it was the way of the cross; and in the third temptation refusing to claim or use miraculous power, except at the Father's bidding, and for the doing of the Father's work.

Again and again in the course of His ministry He declares, with a kind of glorying, His subjection to the Father's will as His rule in all His work. "I came down from heaven not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." "My meat is to do," etc. "I delight to do Thy will, O my God!" When the time for active service is past, and the hour is come for passive endurance of His Father's will, struggle there is and conflict, else there were no victory; there is the recoil of His sinless instinct from the bitter cup; but soon yielding, His human will sinks in the Divine as "sinks the moaning river in the sea, in silver peace." "Not My will but Thine be done!" To this self-renunciation and loving subjection in His work all God's children are predestined to be conformed, and they are so conformed by their identity of life with Him. The words of eternal life spoken by Him have become spirit and life to them. The life in Him, His own life, has passed into them, and therefore the will of God rules that life in them as in Him.

As there is identity of life, so there is a kind of identity in the mission which He had from the Father with that of His Church: "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world." God's salvation in all the earth the end of that mission. He the purchaser of salvation, His people (instrumentally) the dispensers of it. In this work we as a society have our little part. That our doing of the will of God may be of the kind here recognized by Christ, we must accept and delight in that will as supreme, doing it because it is God's will, not because it happens to coincide with our own. Again, God's will must be accepted and delighted in as ruling our whole life, personal and social, secular (as we say) and religious; no margin consciously left wherein we shall be permitted to do as we please. And yet, again, this doing of God's will is from beginning to end an exercise of love. God is love; His will is an expression of love; and that will ruling the new life in us makes our entire service one of love.

Dear sisters, in our day, when profession of Christ's name and outward Christian activities involve so little self-denial, we cannot be too jealous in our self-scrutiny whether our Christian work will bear these tests, proving it to be the outcome of a life hid with Christ in God. This was the hidden root of all that fair fruit of the Spirit which so beautified and enriched the lives of those blessed women approved by Jesus as sister and mother, and made the simplest ministries of love, even to the giving of a cup of cold water, a valued service to be remembered and rewarded at the great day. Let us study their example, that we may emulate their devotion, and share the precious benediction vouchsafed to them.

They all did God's will in a common service; yet each of them had, it may be, a special service, as have we.

There were Joanna, and Susanna, and many nameless ones, of whom it is said "they ministered to Him of their substance"—some more, some less. Joanna, as the wife of Herod's steward, might give costlier gifts than the wife of Zebedee the fisherman, but in His eyes the service was one. We, too, minister to Him of our substance when with loving hearts and willing hands we send to His little ones in the Zenanas of India—hungry, thirsty, strangers, and in prison—the bread and the water of life, visiting them by our missionaries, and giving them a warm room in our sympathies and our love. Oh! that each of us could say "It is my meat to do His will!" Some of them, like the beloved Mary of Bethany, might bring to Jesus an offering rich and rare—not to supply a need, but to afford a pleasure. Such are in our days rare gifts of intellect or imagination—the eye, and hand of the artist, the genius of the poet, or the power of song. These, devoted to the Master as free-will offerings of love, He accepts and says My sister, My mother! There were the Marthas, too, of Bethany, and of many a humble village of Galilee, loving Jesus and loved by Him, though it may be "cumbered about much serving." Thank God, these are yet in the Church, ever administering the gracious hospitalities of well-appointed Christian homes, and furnishing many a cup of refreshment to the Master in the persons of His little ones. Methinks these need a double portion of His spirit, enabling them so to adorn this doctrine, that He may say to them "The Father Himself loveth you because ye have loved Me," and giving them the victory over that trinity of evil which is "not of the Father, but is of the world." And there was the special service given to the thrice blessed Mary of Magdala on that first Easter morn. "Last at the cross and first at the sepulchre," she received the first commission from the lips of the risen Lord: "Mary, go to My brethren and say unto them"—making her by this message His apostle to the apostles, the first apostle of the resurrection.

He tells us, dear sisters, by this, what is the will of His Father in heaven, which He would have us to do—not only to give Him of our substance, and minister to Him in all gracious hospitalities, and pour out for Him our precious ointments, but we are to tell the glad tidings though it may be with trembling lips. "The Lord is risen indeed; we have seen Him, and He hath spoken these words unto us." In the upper room with the twelve, and with Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren, we find these faithful women, after the ascension, waiting for the "promise of the Father," and sharing in the miraculous baptism of fire which made the least in that new kingdom greater than the greatest who had not crossed that sacred threshold. That baptism purged their love to Jesus from the element of mere human friendship. They had known Christ after the flesh; henceforth they were to know Him thus no more. Henceforth one aspiration filled their souls and governed their lives—Christ for the whole world, and the whole world for Christ. Now they understood their Master as never before, the Spirit bringing to their remembrance what He had said unto them: "and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." Each type of service we have indicated we find reproduced in the New Testament Church, but all transfigured as it were by the fire of Pentecost. This it was which gave to the Church a Dorcas, a Lydia and a Phebe, a Priscilla teaching the eloquent Apollos, and a "beloved Persis who laboured much in the Lord." These did the will of His Father in heaven; of them surely he says, My sister, My mother! Nearly two thousand years have passed since these entered into the prepared place in the house of many mansions.

The heathenism of the nineteenth century is as fatally ruinous to the souls of men as that of the first. The Gospel of Christ is to-day, as then, the power of God unto salvation. The Church of Christ is still the appointed channel through which this divine remedy is to be brought into effectual contact with that fatal malady. What has hindered the healing of the nations? Something in the Church has hindered the free flow of the water of life to the perishing. That guilty something has been, has often been acknowledged—1st, the spirit of covetousness in the Church; 2nd, the spirit of conformity to the world; and 3rd, the spirit of indifference, preventing personal effort for the salvation of souls. It is not, however, with the responsibilities and shortcomings of the Church, as such, that we have here to do; it is with our own so doing the will of God as to win the approving recognition of the Elder Brother. The spirit of the New Testament is "free and divinely noble;" therefore the Lord will not say to His people, Give Me a tenth, a fifth, a half of your possessions. He says, I have loved you and given Myself for you; and His free Spirit in their hearts cries, "Take all, Lord; I am not my own, but Thine, all I have and all I am."

So in regard to nonconformity to the world and work for souls. While laying down authoritatively the commands, "Be not conformed to this world," "Let your light so shine," He does not, in the detailed application of these in daily life, say, This thou shalt, thou shalt not; He shows them His will in these details a little more clearly every day. Loving Him, they love His will; and as they freely choose and gladly obey it, there is a testing and a training of the element in their obedience which gives it its value in His sight. In closing, the practical question presents itself, Have these three evils in us hindered our doing of that will? If it has been so, are we willing to-day to know it? Are we now willing to lay bare our consciences to the full pressure of the truth and will of God in this matter? Are we ready, if the verdict of conscience be given against us, to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye?

Beloved sisters, if we be not willing to know the will of God and the special causes which have hindered our doing of it, be assured we shall not know it. It may be written plainly in God's word, and the record of it may be in our hands and on our lips; but it will be to us but a dead letter, because not revealed and applied by the indwelling Spirit. And at this point is the solemn meeting place of the will of the Spirit and the human will—the My will, not Thine; or the Thy will, not Mine. Alas for us if the former is the language of our heart! Self-will and self-indulgence, in so far as they prevent, make "the eye evil," and there can be but darkness. We are by this shutting Him out who stands at the door and knocks. Alas for us if He come not in! On the other hand, if the heart's language be, "Not my will, but Thine," we can honestly ask, "Show me Thy way, O Lord, and I will walk in Thy truth." And the Spirit freely gives the knowledge of God's will. The eye is single; the whole body is full of light; and our souls let go their idols, one by one, so easily, when that revealing touch of light has shown them to be but clay, and now wider room is made in our hearts for Christ, and He dwells in them by faith. Then is the will of God done; and by the soul, when the light of Christ shows clearly, day by day, the whole of present duty, and the love of Christ prompts and inspires to the doing of it. We mourn that we have so little of this experience; it seems a high and distinct attainment, nevertheless, trusting in the blood that cleanseth, and the Spirit promised to guide us into all truth, we "follow after if that we may apprehend that for which also we are apprehended of Jesus Christ."

A VISITOR'S ESTIMATE.

MR. EDITOR,—In your last issue I noticed a communication from a correspondent regarding an important town in the Maritime Provinces, and a sketch of two discourses by one of our brethren labouring there. Will you allow me space to give my impression briefly concerning one of Toronto's pastors, whom I had the privilege of hearing yesterday?

The text selected by the pastor of Knox Church was the sixth verse of the third chapter of the Gospel of John. The sermon was a full, able, and evangelical discussion of the two natures—the flesh and the spirit. The former was proved from Scripture to be corrupt, at enmity with God, and consequently unable