

memory of every child in the class. Love is the greatest of all virtues; greatest in extent, embracing all things; greatest in endurance, last-

ing forever; greatest in manifestation, resulting in fruits; greatest because embracing all other graces.

HOMILETICAL AND PRACTICAL NOTES.

The "supremely excellent way" is that of Christian love. It is love in the highest and purest sense, embracing all things, including God and man. The thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians contains the highest Christian ethics, comprehensive in quality, far-reaching in time as to its principles, and adapted to every condition of mankind.

I. LOVE THE ESSENTIAL ESSENCE OF ALL ETHICAL EXCELLENCE.

Paul shows this by contrasting love with various gifts. As he makes the comparison he finds that the ordinary valuable possessions of this life, either mental or material, are as nothing compared to Christian love.

Though I speak with the tongues. Human eloquence and angelic symphony he considers as noise when compared with the harmony and beautiful development of soul caused by love. The angelic choir was not to Paul a mere matter of the fancy. He had heard the chanting of another world than this. He had listened to the soft, sweet, persuasive, eloquent addresses of Greek orators. These gifts are inharmonious as compared with the music of the well-balanced soul brought into harmony with itself, its God, and fellow human beings.

The writer then names a class of gifts higher than mere art of expression. First the gift of prophecy is contrasted with love. What though a man be inspired, raised to an exaltation of spiritual sight above his fellows, so that he can prophesy, he may be as Balaam wishing to curse rather than bless Israel. Caiaphas, with hate in his heart for Jesus, yet uttered a prophetic truth (John 11. 50).

He advances a step farther when he says, "Though I know all the mysteries." A person could be something more than a prophet, a mere flute or instrument used by God to convey messages to man. He might know the hidden wisdom of the relation of God, to angels, to men in the mystery of redemption, and yet if he did not have love he is nothing. Satan has knowledge of many mysteries hidden to man, but in moral worth his value is as nothing. He might be a great scientist, removed from personal contact with many human beings, possessing secrets of nature, of the rocks, of the chemistry of plants, of the constitution of the planets, of the reasons for the changes of the

seasons, and be without love for God or loving-kindness to men. He might be a wonderful philosopher, understanding the mind of man, capable of formulating the laws of progress, able to predict from "the spirit of the times" the development of civilization, and yet, being without "the supremely excellent way," be as nothing. He might be a huge intellectual machine, a Frankenstein without moral worth. Though one should have the power to remove mountains—the miracle-working power—and did not have love he would be as nothing in the balances of heaven.

Love is next compared with *charity and martyrdom*. Though one should dole out by little portions vast estates or all his living and have not the right motive, the true love for his fellows, this kind of philanthropy would be as nothing. Charity can be given to avoid annoyance, from pride, or to secure favor in some other direction from those who are benefited. Later in the Christian Church there were some who sought to be burned that they might have the good will or approval of their fellows. There appeared quite early in the Church a gloss of the text in which were inserted after the words, "and though I give my body to be burned," these words, "in order that I may boast." Martyrdom would not profit if love was not in the heart.

II. THE POSITIVE CHARACTER OF LOVE.

1. *Suffereth long and is kind.* There are many occasions in everyday life when the natural consequence of friction with our fellow-men would lead us to be impatient, displeased, or angry. The consequent indignation would perhaps be justified by reason and the sentiments and laws of our time, but a great love for humanity will cause us to practice self-restraint and wait until some explanation or ameliorating statement is made concerning the supposed fault of our brother.

Love is kind. She does not merely withhold angry feelings from bursting upon the guilty or faulty individual; she becomes useful in deeds of kindness, taking away the cause of our brother's offense. There are a thousand ways known to love by which she can become kind and useful.

2. *Rejoices with the truth.* Truth is here personified, and love rejoices with truth. Not