

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

CHRIST IN THE BELIEVER AND THE BELIEVER IN CHRIST.

BY REV. ARTHUR HARRIS, OF MAREHAM.

"Abide in Me and I in you."—Jno. xv. 4.

Christ and Christianity are one. The Gospel is not as a code of moral precepts sent forth by a moralist to direct and guide the conduct of men, and which may continue to influence apart from any reference to its author. On the contrary, Christ breathes in its teaching and lives in its recipients. The divine message is powerless, inoperative, apart from Christ, the divine messenger, the revealer, the reconciler, the inspirer of blessed hopes, the bestower of life eternal. Separate Christ from His teaching, and the essential truths of our holy religion fail to renew or subdue fallen, sinful man. It is when Christ is apprehended by saving faith, enthroned in the heart as the ever-living Redeemer, that a man becomes a new creature in Him; and when this occurs the permanence of the purity thereby obtained depends on the permanence of fellowship with Him. The disciple must set his life in Christ and let Christ live in him.

Such seems to be the meaning of the text, for it is as if Jesus had said, "Do ye abide in Me, and admit Me to abide in you, or let Me abide in you. Effect, by God's help, this perfect, mutual fellowship your abiding in Me, My abiding in you." Both thoughts are essential to the completeness of the union. In one sense, the union itself, even the abiding of Christ, is made to depend on the will of the hearer. The other side of the truth is given in verse 16: "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain."

The words of the text are significantly descriptive of the union which subsists between Christ and all believers. He and His people are one. They are to be esteemed as essentially one body, though separated by seas, and rivers, and mountains, and still more by petty names and denominational distinctions. So much are Christ and His people recognized as one that the human body is represented in Scripture as a striking illustration of the union which is between them. The human body is made up of different members, but these so well fit one another, are so dependent one on the other, and work so harmoniously together, that they are felt and recognized as but one. "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free." "Ye are the body of Christ and members in particular."

The illustration in the passage before us likewise shews this union in an interesting and cheering manner, for says Jesus, "I am the vine, ye are the branches." The union between a branch of the vine and the main stem is the closest that can be conceived. It is the whole secret of the branch's life, strength, vigour, beauty and fertility. Separate from the main stem it has no life of its own. The sap and juice that flow from the stem are the origin and maintaining power of all its leaves, buds, blossoms, fruit. It is a beautiful emblem of Christ. The union between Him and believers is just as close and just as real. In themselves believers have no life or strength or spiritual power. All that they have of vital religion comes from Christ. They are what they are, and feel what they feel, and do what they do, because they draw out of Jesus a continual supply of grace, help and ability. Joined to the Lord by faith, and united in mysterious bond with Him by the Spirit, they stand and walk, and continue and run, the Christian race. But every jot of good about them is drawn from their spiritual head—Jesus Christ.

The vine is a root coming out of the ground without much stem, sending forth its branches in all directions. It is unattractive, uninviting, probably the most insignificant thing of life in the vegetable kingdom. How symbolical of Him of whom the prophet speaks, saying, "When we shall see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him, that He is without form and comeliness." The same prophet describes Him as a root out of a dry ground. He was, as it were, a root out of the dried up spiritual nature of man—a root out of the unedged gardens of fallen humanity. But the vine, unattractive and uninviting as it may at one time appear, becomes beautiful and desired when its branches are leaved and laden with

ripe, luscious fruit. In like manner, Christ, the spiritual vine, is eminently inviting and attractive when His branches—all believers—are manifesting the fruits of righteousness, mercy, and truth. And the vine, insignificant and unpromising as it may in the first instance appear, gives forth such an amount of growth and fruitfulness as indicates its own real design. Its fruit not only nourishes, but cheers and invigorates. The juice of that fruit strengthens the weak and emboldens the timid. In a sense incomparably nobler and truer, Christ, the spiritual vine, accomplishes in believers what the natural vine accomplishes for men. Cleansed from sin in His atoning blood, He expels fear from their breast—the fear of God, of death, of judgment. He makes the weak strong—not to commit deeds of lawlessness and violence, but strong to resist evil, strong to perform works of faith and deeds of love. He inspires the hope of an entrance—when life's battle is over—into the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. It was Christ in him that inspired the great apostle of the Gentiles to affirm, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." It was Christ in them that strengthened the noble martyrs to suffer the cruellest of tortures and of deaths, without murmuring or the exhibiting of the least fear or pain. It was Christ in them that nerved our forefathers to dare the tyranny of the Stuarts, and to worship God in the secluded vale or on the heath-clad moor, agreeably to the dictates of their own conscience, and though hunted like beasts of prey. Yes, brethren, it was Christ in these same forefathers that gave them courage and strength to battle and bleed for the possession of the civil and religious liberties which we now enjoy, and which are the bulwark of the throne, the prop and stay of the constitution, and the firmest guarantee and security for national order and tranquillity. It is Christ in him that enables the self-denying missionary to hazard his life for the sake of immortal souls. And it is Christ in him that prompts the dying Christian to breathe in confident and living accents:

"Rock of ages cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

These, brethren, are some of the blessed results which have accrued and are still accruing to men from Christ abiding in them—results which a darkened world cannot perceive, and which it cares not to understand.

The expression of the text is remarkable also as indicating the interpenetration of Christ and believers. For observe, the union is not an arbitrary one, but an essential one. This union is not like that of the stones of a building, which, though cemented together, are yet every one distinct from the other. The union is mutual, for says Jesus, "Abide in Me, and I in you." Believers abide in Him when their affections intertwine around Him and enter into His very heart by channels through which there is a constant and ceaseless flow of His grace, His wisdom, His truth, His love. And He abides in believers when their every holy desire, their every divine thought, their every religious act, are suggested and impelled by Him. Notice the point where you speak of a branch of the vine joining the main stem. There appears to be a line of demarcation between the branch and the stem. But analyze it, dissect it, and you find that the fibres of the vine are running into the branch. Trace it in the opposite direction, the fibres of every branch are running into the stem. There is no point where the union, so to speak, begins. There is absolute possession the one of the other. Thus it is with Jesus Christ and believers. You cannot detect their union physically. Yet He is in them, they are in Him. Believers are in Him, abiding in Him, loving Him, believing on Him, following His footsteps, making His interests their interests, regarding Him as part of themselves. It is thus that the believer differs from the unbeliever; and in this the former possesses such a knowledge of whose he is and of what he himself is, that the accumulated Agnosticism of the ages can neither controvert nor gainsay. Not, however, until we are in Christ, contemplating Him with regardful gaze as the uniting band of all hearts that are in sympathy with Him and actuated by His spirit, can we fully understand and know the meaning of the text, not till then can we know that our root is Christ, and that all that is in the root is for the imparting of peace, joy and strength to believers; and all believers, of whatever clime, or whatever age, to whatever class they may belong, are

united to Him with a true and substantial unity which can never be sundered.

Further, these words imply that this union is immediately accomplished. When a man believes in Christ there is then secured a true union between Christ and him. This may be illustrated by the interesting process of engrafting; and remember, engrafted fruit is the desired and saleable fruit. You put a bud into the stem, following the proper directions, carefully tending it. For some little time there is no vital connection between the bud and the stem; but the moment that the fibres of the bud take root, as it were, in the soil of the vine there is a constant flow of sap into it, and that moment is the beginning of a true and thorough growth. That growth will manifest itself in after days and after years by a large and noble development. Similarly is it with the believer and Christ. The moment a man believes, the moment the union is secured between his heart and the Saviour. Then indeed is Christ's righteousness the believer's righteousness; Christ's love the believer's love; Christ's forgiveness the believer's forgiveness; Christ's sympathy the believer's sympathy; and Christ's humility, meekness and submission, the believer's also. Brethren, it is Christ abiding in you and you in Him, that enable you to develop these the imitable traits of His character. It is these divine graces that give a fragrance and beauty to Christianity, and proclaim its empire and dominion over the hearts and affections of men; and although in you these will be far short of what they are in Him, it is your union with Him that enables you to develop these, and thus to be advancing in the divine life. Let us never forget it is by developing these divine traits we manifest our union with Christ and glorify God while so doing.

There are, however, many professing men and women who are no more in regard to Christ than the bud which has been put into the vine and which has not begun to grow is in regard to the vine; it is not yet part of the vine—it is not interpenetrating. Their union with Christ is outward and formal. Some of them are joined to Christ by baptism and church membership. Some of them go even further than this; are regular communicants and loud talkers about religion. Notwithstanding services and sermons and sacraments, they have no grace in their hearts, no faith, no inward work of the Holy Spirit. They are not vitally engrafted into Christ; but the moment a man believes in Christ there is a true union begun. Christ gives life, and the moment the believer has his root in Him that moment is life imparted. Saving faith in the Redeemer is the efficient cause of that life, and this faith will as assuredly engraft its possessor into Christ as the bud which has been put into the vine and taken root in its soil has been engrafted therein.

It may be here noticed that there is a consciousness of this union. In some it may be a little while before this consciousness is fully experienced; in others it is coeval with believing. Christ is mine, I am His. I don't need to wait until some great act be performed, or until some extraordinary work be done by me, before I am made sensible that a union is effected between the Lord Jesus Christ and my soul. O, brethren, we can know whether we love God and delight to keep His commandments; whether we find our joy in endeavouring to live a life hid with Christ in God; whether we hate sin and are battling against its influence over us and our fellow-men. The moment we believe we may be as conscious of this, as the moment we awake from sleep we are conscious of our existence. In sleep we are unconscious of all around us—even of our own being. In the embrace of sin a man is unconscious of his deadness to God and things spiritual. Awakened by the Holy Spirit, and led to feel the need of the Saviour, repenting of his sins and throwing himself in conscious guilt upon that Saviour, and finally engrafted into Him, he knows that a new life is given him—a life in which all things become new; then does he hate sin and forsake it, love virtue and pursue it, desire good and perform it. To be conscious of this we do not need to wait till our warfare is over—till our earthly home of this tabernacle be dissolved.

Moreover, every growth has its development, its manifestation, and influence; it is never without results. To employ the former illustration, these are obtained by engrafting. When you see the bud growing which has been engrafted into the vine then you know that a vital union has been constituted between