

works before new legislation of this kind is tried. The present clause seems hardly in place in a Patronage Bill. It looks like compulsory retirement without half-pay.

These, however, are but minor blemishes, if allowed to be blemishes at all. The Bill is salutary in aim, and we think it will prove effective in operation. We trust it will pass, and secure for those who have framed it, and those who have lent a helping hand in perfecting it, the hearty thanks of Churchmen generally. We may now look with reasonable confidence to see the Church freed from a set of abuses which were not indeed widely spread, but seemed to be deep-seated, and were certainly deeply hurtful.

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ART. II.—NEW TESTAMENT SAINTS NOT COMMEMORATED.—DORCAS.

A WELL-KNOWN writer has called attention to the example which we have in the chapter of the Acts of the Apostles which contains the brief history of Dorcas, of "the variety of the gifts which are bestowed upon the Christian Church." "Four characters," he says, "exceedingly diverse, are brought before us in this ninth chapter: Paul, a man singularly gifted, morally and intellectually, with qualities more brilliant than almost ever fell to the lot of man; Peter, full of love and daring, a champion of the truth; Ananias, one of those disciples of the inward life whose vocation is sympathy, and who by a single word, 'Brother,' restore light to those that sit in darkness and loneliness; lastly, Dorcas, in a humbler, but not less true sphere of divine goodness, clothing the poor with her own hands, practically loving and benevolent."¹ Of these four characters two are those of recorded and two of unrecorded Saints, and we are thus reminded that the less prominent characters in the inspired narrative are not only necessary to give completeness to the portrait of the Church, as the one Body of Christ, but are introduced for the instruction and encouragement of those to whom humbler gifts and lower ministries are committed.

1. It may be useful to dwell a little on this thought of diversities of gifts, as it is suggested to us in the case of Dorcas. She is the first woman mentioned by name in the history of the Church, after the Day of Pentecost, and she has furnished

¹ Rev. F. W. Robertson, Sermons, 4th series, xiv.

to all who came after her a fruitful example of woman's work for God in quiet spheres and by unobtrusive methods. Possessed of no special advantages, so far as we are told, either of gifts or circumstances, she has yet been counted worthy, for her work's sake, of a place in the oracles of God, and has been the mother of all them who by like humble ministries have adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour, and relieved the necessities of those whom the Lord of Glory is not ashamed to call His brethren. A Jewess by birth—as her Aramaic name, Tabitha, shows—she had embraced the faith of Christ. She would appear to have been, if not alone in the world, yet living apart from her friends at Joppa. Possibly her conversion may have separated her from them. At any rate, when she dies, no near relative appears upon the scene. The “disciples”¹ send to Lydda for Peter to summon him to their aid. The “saints and widows”² receive her when she is restored to life. The dower of personal beauty, which from the apparent stress laid upon her name some writers have claimed for her,³ can with no degree of certainty be said to have been hers. If she possessed it, she consecrated it to the glory of the Giver; but the fact that her Hebrew name, Tabitha, means “gazelle,” a favourite Eastern emblem of beauty, and that St. Luke gives its Greek equivalent, Dorcas, for the benefit of his Gentile readers,⁴ obviously lends no warrant to the assumption. It is for her moral grace and beauty that St. Luke commends her. “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.”⁵ Her gift was the skill of mind and hand to make garments for the poor. Like all natural gifts, it proceeded from God the Holy Ghost. But she recognised it as His gift, and regarded it as translated with herself into the higher sphere of the kingdom of grace, and capable, therefore, of consecration to His service. “There are diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord.” A new “ministration” was now first created in the Church under the one Lord, Who is its Head; a new channel was opened for the exercise of her special gift. The need, as has so often happened since, set in motion the appropriate agency to relieve it. Then, as now,⁶ squalid poverty may well have abounded in Joppa. No

¹ Acts ix. 38.

² Ver. 41.

³ “As her name is dwelt upon with such special emphasis, we must without doubt, see in it a reference to her beauty and loveliness.” Baumgarten, “Apostolic Hist.,” i. 254.

⁴ She may, however, have been actually known by both names. See Dict. of Bible, *Tabitha*.

⁵ 1 Cor. xii. 4.

⁶ “The peasants hereabout (Jaffa) must be very poor, to judge by their rags and squalid appearance. I was reminded of Dorcas and the widows around Peter exhibiting the coats and garments which that

class of persons would be more exposed to it than widows. For them Tabitha, as a Jewess, would have learned to entertain special compassion. The benevolent provisions of the law, and the consentient teaching of Psalmist and Prophet,¹ would foster kindly regard for those who were widows indeed and desolate, in the heart of every true Israelite. Here there was for Dorcas an occupation within her reach, lowly and without display, but which if fulfilled in the name and in the spirit of Him "Who went about doing good," might claim a place among the "ministrations" of His Church. "There are diversities of workings, but the same God, Who worketh all things in all." The "working" of the gift of Dorcas, its practical effect and result, in the ministration in which it found its exercise, was the relief of poverty and distress, as an avowed Christian agency. It was an integral and recognised part, however insignificant it might appear, of the great saving work in the world, by His Son and by His Spirit through His Church, of Him Who worketh all things in all.

2. And this brings us to another thought, suggested by the history of Dorcas, and noticed also in a striking passage by the writer whom we have already quoted :

We err in the comparative estimate we form of great and small. Imagine a political economist computing the value of such a life as this of Dorcas. He views men in masses ; considers the economic well-being of society on a large scale ; calculates what is productive of the greatest good for the greatest number. To him the few coats and garments made for a few poor people would be an item in the world's well-being scarcely worthy of being taken into the reckoning. Let the historian estimate her worth. The chart of time lies unrolled before him. The fall of dynasties, the blending together of races, the wars and revolutions of nations that have successively passed across the world's stage—these are the things that occupy him. What are acts like hers in the midst of interests such as these and of contemplations so large ? All this is beneath the dignity of history. Or again, let us summon a man of larger contemplations still. To the astronomer lifting his clear eye to the order of the stars, this planet itself is but a speck. To come down from the universe to the thought of a tiny earth is a fell descent ; but to descend to the thought of a humble female working at a few garments were a fall indeed.

And then, inviting us to "rise to the Mind of which all other minds are but emanations," he bids us observe that "this conception of grand and insignificant is not found in His nature ;" that with the Eternal Mind "there is neither great nor small," for "It has divided the rings of the earth-

benevolent lady had made, and I devoutly wished she might be raised again, at least in spirit, for there is need of a dozen Dorcas Societies in Jaffa at the present time."—"Land and Book," p. 520.

¹ Exod. xxii. 22 ; Deut. xiv. 29, xxiv. 19-21 ; Ps. lxxviii. 5 ; Isa. i. 17 ; Jer. vii. 6.

worm with as much microscopic care as the orbits in which the planets move, and has painted the minutest feather on the wings of the butterfly as carefully as It has hung the firmament with the silver splendour of the stars." It is the truth which long ago the Psalmist uttered when he exclaimed: "Who is like unto the Lord our God, that hath His seat on high, that humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?"¹ For the Creator to condescend to the creature is the one great step in "humbling Himself." When that is taken, all other intervals, between the greatest and the least, between heaven and earth, are nothing in comparison of it. It is the truth which finds its blessed realization in the Church of Christ, in which every member is alike "necessary" to the well-being and perfection of the whole, and alike the subject of the care and consideration of the Head. It is not, therefore, "beneath the dignity" of the greatest of all history—the inspired history of the Church—to record such humble deeds as those of Dorcas.

3. The history of Dorcas suggests a wide view of the manifoldness of the gifts of God, and helps us to form a just estimate of their comparative value. But it also reveals to us what it is that in the use of gifts constitutes the substance and the eternity of work for God. How graphic is the brief record! How vivid is each scene which it raises as it flits across the stage! And how plainly they all utter the same truth! Dorcas, alive and at work, plying her busy art in her chamber or on the housetop looking across the western sea; threading the narrow streets of that Oriental town, amidst the crowd and jangling; making her way to squalid chamber or wretched hovel. What a commonplace life and work it is! And yet upon it the Holy Ghost has inscribed the sentence—and what higher commendation or more enduring epitaph could be earned by the greatest in the kingdom of God?—"full of good works and almsdeeds which she did." Dorcas dead, lying in the upper chamber; the last sad offices lovingly and reverently performed; to carry her forth and bury her, all that now remains to be done. What an everyday story it is! And yet there is grief in Joppa, such as no great man's funeral would have awakened, with its pomp of hired mourners and pageantry of woe. In every widowed home, to which hers had been as angel's visits, there are tears and lamentations. The whole Church is moved. The burial is delayed. An urgent message is sent to the great Apostle to summon him to their aid. Dorcas is raised to life again, that greatest of miracles (if in miracles there be great and small), so sparingly

¹ Psalm cxiii. 5, 6.

performed either by our Lord or His Apostles, finding here one worthy for whom it should be done. Surely it all teaches us that it is not the form which it assumes, nor the dimensions which it attains, but the spirit in which it is done and the motive from which it springs that is the true measure of work. In that lies the greatness of work. As it is with gifts, so it is with actions. "Many that were rich cast in much," but "a certain poor widow" who "cast in two mites," "cast in more than they all." In that lies the eternity of work. The work of Dorcas has lived on earth. "Wheresoever this gospel" has been preached in the whole world, there has this that this woman did been told for a memorial of her. And when the world has passed away, "he that doeth the will of God," in however obscure and unpretending a sphere, "abideth for ever." "The true Infinite, the real Eternal is Love. When all that economist, historian, philosopher can calculate is gone, the love of Dorcas will be fresh and living in the eternity of the illimitable mind." Lacking that, whatever you may seem to have achieved "you will leave no record of yourself upon earth, except a date of birth and a date of death, with an awfully significant blank between."¹

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ART. III.—CHURCH REFORM AND THE BISHOP OF WORCESTER'S CHARGE.

THE Charge of the Bishop of Worcester, delivered last June, has not met with the consideration which it deserves.² Before placing on record our thoughts upon one important subject—the subject of Church Reform—we should like to quote the deeply interesting and pathetic passage from the early part of the Charge. Those who are acquainted with the internal condition of the diocese of Worcester, know well with what single-hearted and indefatigable zeal the Bishop has behaved for many years. Some have had reason to regret that he never saw his way to preside at a Church Congress, or to summon his Clergy and Laity together for conference and discussion. Some, again, have wished that the Bishop had favoured the design of making Birmingham or Coventry an independent

¹ F. W. Robertson.

² A Charge delivered to the clergy and churchwardens of the Diocese of Worcester, at his visitation in June, 1886. By HENRY, Lord Bishop of Worcester. Rivingtons.