

## CHRISTIANITY AND CHEERFULNESS.

CHRISTIANITY has been called the religion of sorrow. The chief characteristic of its Founder's life may have had something to do with this. Isaiah spoke of Him as "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." His life was one of suffering, and at its close He was crowned with thorns. He drew around Him the sick, and suffering, and sorrowful; and ever since His departure men have thought more of Him in their times of trouble than in their hours of health and happiness. The Gospel He came to preach was for "the poor"—that is, the weak and helpless. Sorrow is also a universal element in the Christian life—sorrow for the sufferings of Christ, sorrow for the sins which pierced and nailed Him to the cross, and sorrow for the sins of men whom His love has not inspired with a desire for spiritual things. It is natural, therefore, that the popular, ideal life of His followers should be that of suffering also; and so we find that the ideal saint, if we take the testimony of art and poetry, is the pale, melancholy countenance, the wasted form, the hands clasped humbly in prayer, the rough garment, and self-inflicted tortures. The great example is John Baptist, between whom and Himself Christ draws a striking and emphatic contrast, adding: "He that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

It is, so we think, a wrong conception. Though we are never told that Christ either laughed or smiled, a man of sad and sorrowful manner is not the picture that is drawn of Him in the Gospel. Young children were never afraid of Him or repelled from Him. He increased the pleasant festivities of a wedding by the first miracle that He wrought in Cana of Galilee. And He was not infrequently found at the tables of men, apparently so enjoying the amenities of social life as to give rise to the calumnious retort that He was "a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." Neither is the popular idea of a saintly character that of the picture of Peter, John, and Paul as drawn for us in the New Testament. They were warm-hearted, sympathetic, cheerful men who carried sunshine with them wherever they went. So it is now. The true saint of God is a happy, cheerful man who innocently enjoys the pleasant things of life. "I have known," says the late Dr. Dale of Birmingham, "some eminent saints—people who loved God with a great love, trusted Him with a perfect faith, kept His commandments, and lived and moved and had their being in the light of the Divine presence—but they were not

at all of the sort that artists delight to paint and poets to celebrate. They were not melancholy, ghastly, sorrow-stricken persons at all. They were brave and hopeful; they heartily enjoyed the pleasant things of life and made light of its sorrows. Some of them had humour and wit, an eye that twinkled merrily, and a laugh that rang like a peal of bells. In health and strength they were the kind of people that take sunlight with them wherever they go, and in sickness they preserved an indomitable cheerfulness."

It is as much the Christian's duty to cultivate the spirit of cheerfulness as to cultivate the spirit of joy and peace. It is a duty he owes to himself. It not only gives him peace of mind, but it also gives him complete control over his powers and faculties. As Addison remarks: "His imagination is always clear and his judgment undisturbed; his temper is even and unruffled, whether in action or in solitude. He comes with relish to all those goods which nature has provided for him, tastes all the pleasures of creation which are round about him, and does not feel the full weight of those accidental evils which may befall him." It is a duty also that we owe to others. It has a reflex benefit and naturally produces love and goodwill towards them. But it does more than this, for it raises good-humour in those who come within its influence. They will ask, What is it that cheers me? As Sir A. Helps says: "In the first place, the unexpected kindness which goes for much. In the next place, the immense encouragement it gives [him] to see that [he] does not appear such a feckless, withered creature to another, as, in moments of despondency, [he] appears to [himself. He] takes refuge in the other's opinion, and says, After all, there are life and hope in me yet. The sick man is really very ill—no fancy about that—but the cheery doctor comes in, rubs his hands, talks of the weather, wonders what the division will be, considers whether the Ministry will resign or dissolve, if they are beaten, and, in fact, treats [him] so thoroughly as if [he] were getting better, that the ailment begins to drop off a little while he is with [him. He] cannot resist such a rush of life as the doctor has brought into the room." And it is also a duty he owes to God. It is an expression of his gratitude. It rises as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for His providential care and goodness. It is the way in which he expresses his satisfaction in the state of life to which he is called, and his secret approval of all God's dealings with him.

The one thing which is destructive of cheerfulness is the consciousness of guilt. If the Christian is conscious of secret sin or some unconfessed wrong that he has done, he will have no claim to that quiet serenity and tranquillity of mind which

are the natural results of innocence and virtue. Under such circumstances, to put on the appearance of cheerfulness is mere assumption, if not something much worse. But apart from this, there is nothing, not even the trials and afflictions of life, that can or need destroy it. The sufferings of life are but for a moment, and work in us a far more exceeding weight of glory. Pain and sickness, hardship and poverty, do not deserve the name of evil when we consider the great good they may do us. A mind at peace with God "may bear up under them with fortitude, with indolence, and with cheerfulness of heart. The tossing of a tempest does not discompose him, which he is sure will bring him to a joyful harbour." Why should he be downcast when victory is sure?

Every Christian man has three sources of cheerfulness. First, himself. He is an immortal being, his existence can never end, and he can rejoice in the thought that after unnumbered ages he will still be at the beginning. As he reflects upon his past, the great progress he has made in the few years of this life, and how, when he enters into the presence of God, with all his powers and faculties enlarged and expanded, there will be fresh stages of perfection to be attained and new fields of knowledge to explore, he cannot help but be more cheerful. The consciousness of such an existence will fill with holy joy the heart of a good man, and make him happier in himself than he has power to conceive.

Secondly, God on whom we depend. We know comparatively little of Him now, but what we do know shows us that He is a Being of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; that He is great and glorious, and full of compassion and mercy; that we are the objects of His Fatherly care and foresight. "In short, we depend upon a Being," as Addison remarks, "whose power qualifies Him to make us happy by an infinity of means, whose goodness and truth engage Him to make those happy who desire it of Him, and whose unchangeable will will secure us in this happiness to all eternity."

And, thirdly, the world in which we live, which is full of objects calculated to produce in us this cheerful state of mind. "Those who love nature can never be dull. They may have other temptations; but at least they will run no risk of being beguiled by ennui, idleness, or want of occupation, 'to buy the merry madness of an hour with the long penitence of after-time'" (Lubbock). The world was made for those who dwell therein, and our heavenly Father has furnished it, not only with things useful, but with things beautiful for our enjoyment, instruction, and pleasure. "If thy heart be right," says Thomas à Kempis, "then will every

creature be to thee a mirror of life, and a book of holy doctrine." And Ruskin, speaking of the mountains, says: "They seem to have been built for the human race, as at once their schools and their cathedrals; full of treasures of illuminated manuscript for the scholars, kindly in simple lessons for the worker, quiet in pale cloisters for the thinker, glorious in holiness for the worshipper. They are great cathedrals of the earth, with their gates of rock, pavements of cloud, choirs of stream and stone, altars of snow, and vaults of purple traversed by continual stars." To the Christian there is infinite delight in nature, because he sees his Father's hand in everything. Edward Garbett, speaking of the writer of Ps. civ., uses these words: "He speaks of the glories of the sky; but it is God who covereth Himself with light, who maketh the clouds His chariots, and walketh upon the wings of the wind. He describes the spreading landscape, with the green hills and fertile valleys, rich with the olive and the vine, musical with the running streams, and filled with the sound of happy life from the birds of the air to the browsing herd; but it is God who sendeth the springs into the valleys, and watereth the hills, and bringeth fruit out of the earth. He celebrates the marvellous order of the world and all its wise contrivances, with sun and moon, and day and night, all in their courses. But it is that he may exclaim, 'O Lord, how marvellous are Thy works! in wisdom has Thou made them all.'"

The cultivation of this spirit of cheerfulness is a duty incumbent upon all, but especially upon those who are workers for God among the toiling masses of mankind. "The best person," Dr. Dale remarks, "to visit the aged and the poor—other things being equal—is the one whose step is the lightest, whose heart is the merriest, and who comes into a dull and solitary house like a fresh mountain breeze, or like a burst of sunshine on a cloudy day. No one can make a greater mistake than to suppose that he is too cheerful to be a good visitor of the sick and wretched. Cheerfulness is one of the most precious gifts for those who desire to lessen the sorrows of the world. It can do what wealth cannot do. Money may diminish external miseries; a merry heart can, for the time at least, drive the interior grief away."

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