

Had he been constructing a mythical religion, had he been weaving a creed out of his own poetic fancy, it would have been a creed which expressed the distance of the Divine from the human. The fact that his actual faith is a union of the human with the Divine constitutes a certain proof that his strong mind was dominated by an influence in the historic air.

G. MATHESON.

THE SUPREMACY OF LOVE.

1 COR. xiii. 13.

AMIDST the flood of doubtful disputation which prevails respecting the first principles of religion and of duty, the supremacy of the virtue which St. Paul exalts in this passage is, in general terms, universally admitted. It might, indeed, be questioned whether this supremacy be consistent with the principles of a philosophy which would explain the progress of mankind, as of all other creatures, by the operation of a mutual struggle and a mutual antagonism. But at all events, whether consistently or not, philosophers and moralists of almost all schools of thought combine in inculcating love to others as the most important principle and guide of practical life. It is perpetually emerging, like the solid ground, from every deluge of speculation which sweeps over the moral world. In the forefront, for instance, of the chief expositions of the Positive Philosophy, love is described as the principle of life, while order is said to be its basis, and progress its end. In the growth of this virtue, in its exaltation to an enthusiastic height, we are constantly bidden to recognize an adequate pledge for the security of society, notwithstanding the overthrow of ancient creeds, and the disturbance of ancient order. The language,

indeed, in which this virtue is described, is generally far less simple, less direct, less real, and therefore less profound and fervid than that of the Apostle. But whether it be the enthusiasm of fraternity, or of equality, or of humanity, which is to take the place of older governing principles, in each case a homage, and often a willing and generous homage, is paid to this Apostolic declaration of the governing principle of human life. To the Christian, indeed, such schemes of social order and development may seem like fair structures without foundations; but none the less they afford a striking addition to the ever accumulating evidence of the correspondence of the Gospel with the deepest instincts of the heart, and they may well elicit anew the exclamation of one of the Fathers of the Church, *O testimonium animæ naturaliter Christianæ!*

The supremacy therefore of the Principle of Love in our nature may be taken as one of those truths which form the axioms of moral and religious thought. However vaguely apprehended, it would be disputed by few; and we may safely take it as a starting point, whether for religious meditation or for theological reasoning. But the more this supremacy is admitted, the more important becomes the enquiry as to what it involves; and it is to this that the following observations would now direct attention. We may observe, then, that love is essentially a personal relation. The word may, indeed, be used loosely of our mere liking for inanimate or impersonal objects; it may be degraded to express an animal passion. But all such uses of the word are either abuses of its meaning or are figurative. As the modern poet of chivalry has exquisitely expressed it: "True love's the gift which God has given to man alone beneath the heaven;" it is "the tie, which heart to heart, and mind to mind, in body and in soul can bind." The discriminating genius of the Greek language has marked the absolute difference of this love from the lower forms of passion by assigning special

words to each ; and there are some who have regretted that no similar distinction has been maintained in our own language. But, we may perhaps be permitted to think, there is another point of view from which the absence of any such verbal distinction may appear prompted by a true instinct in a Christian nation. It was necessary for a Greek to recognize sensual passion as one form of human relationship. But the Christian best expresses the lofty ideal which is ever before his eyes, and best exemplifies that charity which thinketh no evil and which believeth all things, by refusing to contemplate men and women as united by any lower tie than that of love, or by refusing to contemplate our lower nature except in the light shed upon it by the higher. At all events, it is something to be reminded, by the very language we use, that nothing deserves the name of Love which cannot also claim the designation of Charity. Love is thus the highest relation which one personal being can assume towards another ; and it seems necessary to insist upon this characteristic in it, because, in many of those general phrases to which I have adverted, its true nature is obscured by its association with mere abstractions. It is not with humanity but with human beings, that love is concerned ; and such mere intellectual abstractions are only useful, so far as they assist us in placing ourselves in that individual relation to individuals in which love finds its existence and its sphere of action. That which the Apostle has in view in his glowing description of this virtue is not a vague emotion of the heart, but the self-sacrifice, the devotion, the patience which are evoked in one soul by the presence of another. The description springs out of the contemplation of Christians, in the preceding Chapter, as being all members of one body ; and this close personal relation is borne in mind throughout. The charity which suffers long and is kind, which is not easily provoked, which thinks no evil, which bears all things, believes all things,

hopes all things, endures all things, is concerned at every turn with some other soul, weaker or stronger, as the case may be; and it is towards this individual soul, in its weakness or in its overweening strength, not towards any general idea, nor even, in the first instance, towards the whole society, that charity finds its exercise. A loose and inaccurate way of speaking about Love is not unfrequently heard, as though it were some product or quality of the individual heart which overflowed towards others; and the error, subtle as it may at first seem, is apt to lead to the gravest obscurity in its development. If we desired to explain the law of gravitation, it would, if I mistake not, be very inaccurate and misleading to speak of matter in general as exerting some attractive force. The only correct mode of stating the law is to say that any one portion of matter in relation to any other portion is subject to a certain attraction or pressure. Similarly, love cannot be properly described as a general quality of the human heart. It is the moral and spiritual force which is evoked between two hearts and two persons; and, like gravitation, it varies with the relative position and character of the two.

Now let us consider whether, if these observations, simple as they may seem when pointed out, be borne in mind, they do not throw some valuable light on the method and character of the Gospel. It would appear to follow from them that the degree in which this gracious virtue of love can be evoked in our nature must depend upon the personal relations in which we are placed. The relation, perhaps, may be sometimes and in some measure an ideal one; but the vision of a person must be brought before the soul, if its highest faculties are to be aroused and its noblest emotions drawn forth. We all know, and it is the privilege of a generous youth to feel with peculiar vividness, what an ennobling effect is produced upon our nature by love, in the true sense of the word, thus aroused towards a kindred

soul; while we also know and feel how intimately and essentially this influence is dependent on the personal character of the relation. It was the favourite theme of our greatest poets in the most splendid period of our literature, and perhaps of our national life; and in Spenser's lofty verse the Vision of Love and Beauty, and the Vision of Heavenly Love and Beauty, are so closely associated that they seem to merge into one another. But poets of less spiritual flight, and more concerned with the ordinary passions of human nature, have similarly depicted their heroes as rising to their noblest heights under the inspiration of this generous passion. When St. Paul discerns in the true relation of husband and wife a picture of the relation of Christ to his Church, he justifies and sanctifies these transcripts from nature, and welds together in essential union the most human and the most divine aspect of love. Where, indeed, even in the light of the Gospel, shall we find more touching illustrations of some of the excellencies which the Apostle ascribes to charity, than in the personal affections of a gracious family life? The love which suffers long and is kind, which envies not, which seeks not her own, which is not easily provoked, which thinks no evil, which bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things,—is not this the love of mothers and of wives, the devotion of true sons and husbands? What an astonishing power is there in such love and such devotion to suppress the selfishness in a man or a woman, and to arouse all the faculties of our nature in the service of the person to whom we are devoted!

But when we remember that in all this play and development of energy, it is the personal devotion to the person upon which the whole depends, a further question suggests itself. That question is, whether all these stirrings of heart towards men like ourselves, all these quickenings of the moral and spiritual pulse can be more than the first awakenings of the

human soul towards its true destiny—that of communion and union with a perfect Person. With respect to all these emotions, even the truest and most beautiful, when viewed independently of higher relations, in how lamentable a degree is illusion blended with them! Those illusions are often the mockery—the cruel and unworthy mockery—of maturer years; and they are not less often the bitter disappointments of tender and faithful hearts. But suppose a love open to human nature which should be subject to no such illusion; imagine a Person revealed to men and women on whom they could lavish the inexhaustible stores of their affection, their admiration, their devotion, and be sure that all, and more than all, would fall short of what was due, and be a feeble response to the infinite reality: and what might not then be expected to be the influence produced upon our nature? You have the answer in this Chapter, which was, in fact, the response elicited from the soul of St. Paul by the vision of the Lord Jesus Christ, by the love of the Saviour for him and his responsive love for the Saviour. It is essential for us to remember, if we would enter into the spirit of such passages, that they are prompted by a sense of abiding communion with the abiding Incarnation of Love, in all its patience and gentleness. Again, we cannot too clearly bear in mind that there was nothing abstract in such a description. It is no catalogue of general principles. It is but an expansion of the exhortation in another Epistle: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” “I live,” says the Apostle, at another time, “yet, not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Such was the personal source of the Apostle’s love, and such its personal character.

In other words, it seems to follow, if this view of the nature of Love, and of the intensely and supremely personal

character of our being be accepted, that the perfection of our nature is unattainable, and even inconceivable, unless there be some perfect Person, towards whom, and through whom, these great affections of the soul may be completely and unreservedly developed. You cannot touch the deepest chords of the human heart, you cannot evoke its full harmonies, by any other influence than this. It is not merely our happiness, but—if that be deemed unworthy of mention, it is our powers and faculties, our energies for the highest purposes of life, which must depend for their fullest development upon the animating and harmonizing influence of love. It is this alone which can enable us to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things; it is this alone for which no hyperbole is too strong; this alone which leads from childish things to the full maturity of manhood. How is this love to be perfected, how is it to be secured against the most bitter disillusion, unless there be a perfect Person towards whom it can be directed, and in whom and through whom it can be exercised towards others? For, if it be impossible to love perfectly any one but a perfect person, it would seem not less difficult to discern upon what other ground the unbounded love, the unrestricted devotion, inculcated in this Chapter and elsewhere towards all men is to be adequately supported. It does not seem to follow on mere principles of reason that all the individuals of the same race are members one of another. It is not so with any other race besides our own; and some plausible reasons, and some very strong sentiments might be, and have been, adduced against it. The truth may, perhaps, be deducible from principles of natural reason; but the argument would be hardly so apparent or so forcible as to constitute a very urgent motive. In point of fact, St. Paul does not base it on any such principle, nor do other inspired teachers. They base it upon the common relation of human souls to one eternal

Person, who is, and has always been, present to every one of them, who loves them with a personal love, and to whom their own love is due. "Ye," says the Apostle, in the Verses immediately preceding, "are the body of Christ, and members in particular." This is the sacred relation which secures for all other relations a permanent standing ground and an adamant bond. If Christ be related to other men in a manner similar, even if differing in degree, to that in which He is related to ourselves, then we are bound to each one of them in exact proportion to our union with Him, and in the same proportion shall we exhibit his spirit or his love towards them.

In short, on these principles, whether for our own individual perfection or for the perfect development of universal love towards men, the existence of a perfect Person, with whom we are all in communion, seems indispensable. Such perfection, indeed, may seem a high aim for a human spirit to set before itself; but perfection, or at least blessedness, in some form or other, has been proved by experience to be the ineradicable desire of the soul of man. That desire may, indeed, be dulled for a time, or chilled by despair. But such an acquiescence in imperfection brings with it, like the disappointed philosophy of the ancient world, a decay of energy, an abandonment of hope, in every sphere of life, and relaxes the spring of all noble thoughts and emotions. "Be ye perfect" is a command which is implied in all others, and is one of their main animating motives; and, in offering the means for this perfection, the Gospel possesses one of its deepest claims upon our spirits.

Accordingly, the whole course of the Divine Revelation may be regarded, in one aspect, as the gradual unveiling to the human spirit of a Person who should respond to this ultimate and essential demand of human nature; while the fall or the rise, the growth or the corruption, of men has depended upon the degree in which they have welcomed

these successive gleams of personal light and love, and have clung to the Divine Being who was thus appealing to their innermost souls. The weakness which led to the first fall described in the Scriptures lay above all in a feeble apprehension of the authority and character of God, and a consequent doubt as to the reality and the certainty of his command. The first great step upwards, on the part of Abraham, is a recovery of the vision of this Divine Being, a recognition of his voice and a personal faith in his promise. "The Lord appeared unto Abraham and said, I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect, and I will make my covenant between Me and thee." Thenceforward the education proceeds by means, on the one side, of personal words—of command, of exhortation, of rebuke, or of comfort—from this personal God; and, on the other side, by acts of personal faith, rising gradually into a clearer hope, and in the more favoured spirits bursting into a flame of ardent love. The description which the Apostle gives of the Gospel is true of the whole revelation which had preceded it, and of which it is the completion:—"Therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, the just shall live by faith." At length this divine vision of grace and truth, which at sundry times and in divers manners had illuminated the souls of patriarchs and prophets, was made flesh and dwelt among us, and men beheld the glory of the only begotten Son of the Father. Then, accordingly, for then only was it possible, Love assumed a prominence and a supremacy in the hearts of men over all other powers and graces. The word "love" starts suddenly in the New Testament into a new importance, and becomes the key-word of apostolic thought.

Such a result follows naturally from the principles we have been considering, and is at once explained by them. Love starts into this sudden life and this intense energy, because for the first time a Person was fully revealed who could

awaken this most personal of all emotions. It is true, the law had from early times been summed up in the command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." But the Lord of whom this command spoke was still shrouded in too awful and too dim a garb to awaken in any but the greatest souls a free and spontaneous response of love. Clouds and darkness were round about Him, righteousness and judgment were the habitation of his seat; and accordingly it is faith and hope which are the dominant emotions of the Old Testament. "These," says the sacred writer, as he concludes the glorious summary of the *Acta Sanctorum* under the old covenant, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises," not having been vouchsafed a vision of those gracious lineaments, nor having heard those gracious words, which revealed to the soul of man the immediate presence of its God and its Saviour. "The law," says St. John, "was given by Moses, but grace and truth"—the qualities which are the food of love—"came by Jesus Christ." Such has been the history from first to last—the history of the revelation of a Person, and of the awakening in human souls of the emotions which such a Person can alone call forth. The redemption of man begins with faith, and proceeds through hope, and ends in love, until all is summed up in the matured conviction of the last Apostle that "God is Love, and he that dwelleth in Love dwelleth in God; and God in him."

Such is the glorious, but at the same time simple, revelation which the Gospel opens to us. It is not a philosophy; it is not a law; it is not a theosophic speculation. It is the incarnation, and through the incarnation, the revealing, of a Person for whom personal souls are craving. I know not how far Christian divines are responsible for having obscured, by too presuming a spirit of rational speculation, this essential characteristic of the Gospel. But it is cer-

tainly marvellous how the sceptical philosophy of our times seems to regard Christianity as simply an elaborate scheme of mysterious doctrines on subjects beyond human ken. Many of those doctrines, as, for instance, the Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity, are indeed the necessary intellectual results, and therefore the necessary intellectual conditions, of the acceptance of certain cardinal facts. But if we would hold fast for ourselves the truths of our Faith, if we would meet the difficulties which are pressed upon us from without, and if we would assist others in encountering them, we cannot too diligently bear in mind that, in the revelation of the Gospel, the one essential and primary fact is that it reveals a Person, and that towards that Person it claims from us the homage of faith, of hope, and of love. There are, indeed, infinite mysteries in his relations to us—how could it be otherwise when there are such mysteries in our relations to each other?—and great injustice would be done by any disparagement of the laborious efforts of Fathers, Reformers, and Theologians to trace, with reverence and with patience, the laws of those mysterious relations. But the grand and simple facts exist independently of such explanations, and form the basis on which all doctrines must be built. It is this which renders the Gospel, notwithstanding its infinite depth and mystery, a revelation which, in its essential elements, can be grasped by the simplest soul. Little as we know of our mental and bodily constitution, we know that we can love and trust; and these also are the simple and natural qualities to which the Gospel appeals. It reveals the presence in our midst of three Divine Persons, full of grace and truth, and the moment we yield them the faith, the hope, and the love which are their due, and which, when they are really seen, they cannot fail to arouse—that moment the soul of a man is redeemed and his salvation is begun. In a word, it is admitted, nay, even asserted, as I observed at the outset, by those who reject our Faith, that love

is the very bond of peace and of all other virtues. That is an essentially Christian doctrine, and to the influence of the Gospel its prevalence is probably due. We only call on men to admit within this sphere of love those three Divine Persons whom the Gospel reveals, and to allow their hearts the blessing, not merely of affection and devotion to one another, but of communion with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and with the love of God, and of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Such are the truths in the mind of the Apostle as he concludes his praise of Charity in the familiar words:—"Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." It is characteristic of him to be clinging to the vision of that which alone is permanent amidst the transitory scenes of the world. "We know," he says elsewhere, "that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." But what is this eternal home and refuge of the soul? It is found in one reality alone—one which seemed at the time to the world at large, and is too apt to seem even at the present day, the slightest and least permanent of all realities. It is found in a Person, it is revealed in a Man. What a strange dream it was to the natural eye for the Apostle to contemplate, as in this passage, the vanishing away of everything except the person of Christ! Prophecies, tongues, knowledge, and with knowledge the whole material world in which knowledge finds its sphere, vanishing away, and nothing remaining but the central person of the crucified Lord and our personal spirits around Him, still offering Him the homage of faith, hope, and love, and still reflecting that grace of love towards one another. A natural feeling has constantly arisen in the minds of those who contemplate the heavens, the work of the Divine fingers, the moon and the stars which He has ordained, that man is too insignificant a creature to evoke

those displays of the Divine love and grace of which our Faith speaks. Some feeling of that kind is probably at the root of many difficulties felt by thoughtful men of science at the present day. It is a feeling which can only be counteracted by concentrating our hearts and thoughts on those displays of the heights and depths of personal life and love which the Scriptures reveal. In that contemplation we may gradually learn, with the Apostle, to feel that the relative greatness and permanence of the soul of man and of nature are precisely the reverse of that which is apparent to the natural eye. "Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three," because these fragile personalities of ours, in their relation to one eternal Person, and through Him to all others, are the only realities which will survive the consummation of the ages and the destruction of worlds. It seems to be almost an anticipation of the scientific vision of the present day when another Apostle depicts the very heavens as passing away with a great noise and the elements melting with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, being burned up. But there will abide, through all, the Sun of the moral and spiritual world, and the saints, "like stars," performing their course around Him. In the presence of this abiding vision how unworthy become the attractions—in proportion as it is realized, how impotent the temptations of this transitory world!

HENRY WACE.

BRIEF NOTICES.

THE EVANGELICAL REVIVAL, AND OTHER SERMONS. *By R. W. Dale, M.A.* (London: Hodder and Stoughton.) Wholesome sermons than these it is almost impossible to conceive. Mr. Dale's preaching has always been remarkable for moral energy and fervour; but here this characteristic rises to its highest power. His words positively burn; you can feel the warmth of them as you turn the page, so swift and intense is the moral force which impels