

and rising fabric—rising I cannot doubt not only materially but morally and spiritually—of modern society.

Throughout this historical investigation we must keep in view, as matters still needing full and assured explanation, the distinction of right and wrong, the material universe, and the imperfection of moral recompense in the present life.

The best method of research in this further and historical stage of our inquiry, will be the subject of my next paper.

JOSEPH AGAR BEET.

---

## THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

### III.

#### THE PRAYER.

“For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray and to make request for you, that ye may be filled with the knowledge of His will, in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks unto the Father.”—COL. i. 9-12 (Rev. Ver.).

WE have here to deal with one of Paul's prayers for his brethren. In some respects these are the very topmost pinnacle of his letters. Nowhere else does his spirit move so freely, in no other parts are the fervour of his piety and the beautiful simplicity and depth of his love more touchingly shown. The freedom and heartiness of our prayers for others are a very sharp test of both our piety to God and our love to men. Plenty of people can talk and vow who would find it hard to pray. Paul's intercessory prayers are at high-water mark of the Epistles in which they occur. He must have been a good man and a true friend of whom so much can be said.

This prayer sets forth the ideal of Christian character. What Paul desired for his friends in Colosse is what all true Christian hearts should chiefly desire for those whom they love, and should strive and ask for for themselves. If we look carefully at these words we shall see a clear division into parts which stand related to each other as root, stem, and fourfold branches, or as fountain, undivided stream, and "four heads" into which this "river" of Christian life "is parted." To be filled with the knowledge of God's will is the root or fountain-source of all. From it comes, a walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing—the practical life being the outcome and expression of the inward possession of the will of God. Then we have four clauses, evidently co-ordinate, each beginning with a participle, and together presenting an analysis of this worthy walk. It will be fruitful in all outward work. It will be growing in all inward knowledge of God. Because life is not all doing and knowing, but is suffering likewise, the worthy walk must be patient and long-suffering, because strengthened by God Himself. And to crown all, above work and knowledge and suffering it must be thankfulness to the Father. The magnificent massing together of the grounds of gratitude which follows, we must leave for future consideration, and pause, however abruptly, yet not illogically, at the close of the enumeration of these four branches of the tree, the four sides of the firm tower of the true Christian life.

I. Consider the Fountain or Root of all Christian character—"that ye may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding."

One or two remarks in the nature of verbal exposition may be desirable. Generally speaking, the thing desired is the perfecting of the Colossians in religious knowledge, and the perfection is forcibly expressed in three different aspects. The idea of completeness up to the height of their capacity

is given in the prayer that they may be "filled," like some jar charged with sparkling water to the brim. The advanced degree of the knowledge desired for them is given in the word here employed, which is a favourite in the Epistles of the Captivity, and means additional or mature knowledge, that deeper apprehension of God's truth which perhaps had become more obvious to Paul in the quiet growth of his spirit during his life in Rome. And the rich variety of forms which that advanced knowledge would assume is set forth by the final words of the clause, which may either be connected with its first words, so meaning "filled . . . so that ye may abound in . . . wisdom and understanding;" or with "the knowledge of His will," so meaning a "knowledge which is manifested in." That knowledge will blossom out into *every kind* of "wisdom" and "understanding," two words which it is hard to distinguish, but of which the former is perhaps the more general and the latter the more special, the former the more theoretical and the latter the more practical: and both are the gifts of the Divine Spirit whose sevenfold perfection of gifts illuminates with perfect light each waiting heart. So perfect, whether in regard to its measure, its maturity, or its manifoldness, is the knowledge of the will of God, which the Apostle regards as the deepest good which his love can ask for these Colossians.

Passing by many thoughts suggested by the words, we may touch one or two large principles which they involve. The first is, that the foundation of all Christian character and conduct is laid in the knowledge of the will of God. Every revelation of God is a law. What it concerns us to know is not abstract truth, or a revelation for speculative thought, but God's *will*. He does not show Himself to us in order merely that we may know, but in order that, knowing, we may do, and, what is more than either knowing or doing, in order that we may be. No revelation from God has

accomplished its purpose when a man has simply understood it, but every fragmentary flash of light which comes from Him in nature and providence, and still more the steady radiance that pours from Jesus, is meant indeed to teach us how we should think of God, but to do that mainly as a means to the end that we may live in conformity with His will. The light is knowledge, but it is a light to guide our feet, knowledge which is meant to shape practice.

If that had been remembered, two opposite errors would have been avoided. The error that was threatening the Colossian Church, and has haunted the Church in general ever since, was that of fancying Christianity to be merely a system of truth to be believed, a rattling skeleton of abstract dogmas, very many and very dry. An unpractical heterodoxy was their danger. An unpractical orthodoxy is as real a peril. You may swallow all the creeds bodily, you may even find in God's truth the food of very sweet and real feeling: but neither knowing nor feeling is enough. The one all-important question for us is—does our Christianity *work*? Is it knowledge of His *will*, which becomes an ever active force in our lives? Any other kind of religious knowledge is windy food; as Paul says, it “puffeth up;” the knowledge which feeds the soul with wholesome nourishment is the knowledge of His *will*.

The converse error to that of unpractical knowledge, that of an unintelligent practice, is quite as bad. There is always a class of people, and they are unusually numerous to-day, who profess to attach no importance to Christian doctrines, but to put all the stress on Christian morals. They swear by the “Sermon on the Mount,” and are blind to the deep doctrinal basis laid in that “sermon” itself, on which its lofty moral teaching is built. What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. Why pit the parent against the child? why wrench the blossom from its stem? Knowledge is sound when it moulds conduct. Action is

good when it is based on knowledge. The knowledge of God is wholesome when it shapes the life. Morality has a basis which makes it vigorous and permanent when it rests upon the knowledge of His will.

Again : Progress in knowledge is the law of the Christian life. There should be a continual advancement in the apprehension of God's will, from that first glimpse which saves, to the mature knowledge which Paul here desires for his friends. The progress does not consist in leaving behind old truths, but in a profounder conception of what is contained in these truths. How differently a Fijian just saved, and a Paul on earth, or a Paul in heaven, look at that verse, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"! The truths which are dim to the one, like stars seen through a mist, blaze to the other like the same stars to an eye that has travelled millions of leagues nearer them, and sees them to be suns. The law of the Christian life is continuous increase in the knowledge of the depths that lie in the old truths, and of their far-reaching applications. We are to grow in knowledge of the Christ by coming ever nearer to Him, and learning more of the infinite meaning of our earliest lesson that He is the Son of God who has died for us. The constellations that burn in our nightly sky looked down on Chaldean astronomers, but though these are the same, how much more is known about them at Greenwich than was dreamed at Babylon!

II. Consider the River or Stem of Christian conduct.

The purpose and outcome of this full knowledge of the will of God in Christ is to "walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing." By "walk" is of course meant the whole active life; so that the principle is brought out here very distinctly, that the last result of knowledge of the Divine will is an outward life regulated by that will. And the sort of life which such knowledge leads to, is designated in most

general terms as "worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing," in which we have set forth two aspects of the true Christian life.

"Worthily of the Lord!" The "Lord" here, as generally, is Christ, and "worthily" seems to mean, in a manner corresponding to what Christ is to us, and has done for us. We find other forms of the same thought in such expressions as "worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph. iv. 1), "worthy of saints" (Rom. xvi. 2), "worthy of the Gospel" (Phil. i. 27), "worthy of God" (1 Thess. ii. 12), in all of which there is the idea of a standard to which the practical life is to be conformed. Thus the Apostle condenses into one word all the manifold relations in which we stand to Christ, and all the multifarious arguments for a holy life which they yield.

These are mainly two. The Christian should "walk" in a manner corresponding to what Christ has done for him. "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people, and unwise?" was the mournful wondering question of the dying Moses to his people, as he summed up the history of unbroken tenderness and love on the one side, and of disloyalty almost as uninterrupted on the other. How much more pathetically and emphatically might the question be asked of us? We say that we are not our own, but bought with a price. Then how do we repay that costly purchase? Do we not requite His blood and tears, His unquenchable, unalterable love, with a little tepid love which grudges sacrifices and has scarcely power enough to influence conduct at all, with a little trembling faith which but poorly corresponds to His firm promises, with a little reluctant obedience? The richest treasure of heaven has been freely lavished for us, and we return a sparing expenditure of our hearts and ourselves, repaying fine gold with tarnished copper, and the flood of love from the heart of Christ with a few niggard drops grudgingly squeezed from ours.

Nothing short of complete self-surrender, perfect obedience, and unwavering unfaltering love can characterize the walk that corresponds with our profound obligations to Him. Surely there can be no stronger cord with which to bind us as sacrifices to the horns of the altar than the cords of love. This is the unique glory and power of Christian ethics, that it brings in this tender personal element to transmute the coldness of duty into the warmth of gratitude, so throwing rosy light over the snowy summits of abstract virtue. Repugnant duties become tokens of love, pleasant as every sacrifice made at its bidding ever is. The true Christian spirit says: Thou hast given Thyself wholly for me: help me to yield myself to Thee. Thou hast loved me perfectly: help me to love Thee with all my heart.

The other side of this conception of a worthy walk is, that the Christian should act in a manner corresponding to Christ's character and conduct. We profess to be His by sacredest ties: then we should set our watches by that dial, being conformed to His likeness, and in all our daily life trying to do as He has done, or as we believe He would do if He were in our place. Nothing less than the effort to tread in His footsteps is a walk worthy of the Lord. All unlikeness to His pattern is a dishonour to Him and to ourselves. It is neither worthy of the Lord, nor of the vocation wherewith we are called, nor of the name of saints. Only when these two things are brought about in my experience—when the glow of His love melts my heart and makes it flow down in answering affection, and when the beauty of His perfect life stands ever before me, and though it be high above me, is not a despair, but a stimulus and a hope—only then do I “walk worthy of the Lord.”

Another thought as to the nature of the life in which the knowledge of the Divine will should issue, is expressed in the other clause—“unto all pleasing,” which sets forth the great aim as being to please Christ in everything. That

is a strange purpose to propose to men, as the supreme end to be ever kept in view, to satisfy Jesus Christ by their conduct. To make the good opinion of men our aim is to be slaves; but to please this Man ennobles us, and exalts life. Who or what is He, whose judgment of us is thus all-important, whose approbation is praise indeed, and to win whose smile is a worthy object for which to use life, or even to lose it? We should ask ourselves, Do we make it our ever present object to satisfy Jesus Christ? We are not to mind about other people's approbation. We can do without that. We are not to hunt after the good word of our fellows. Every life into which that craving for man's praise and good opinion enters is tarnished by it. It is a canker, a creeping leprosy, which eats sincerity and nobleness and strength out of a man. Let us not care to trim our sails to catch the shifting winds of this or that man's favour and eulogium, but look higher, and say, "With me it is a very small matter to be judged of man's judgment." "I appeal unto Cæsar." He, the true Commander and Emperor, holds our fate in His hands; we have to please Him and Him only. There is no thought which will so reduce the importance of the babble around us, and teach us such brave and wholesome contempt for popular applause, and all the strife of tongues, as the constant habit of trying to act as ever in our great Taskmaster's eye. What does it matter who praise, if He frowns? or who blame, if His face lights with a smile? No thought will so spur us to diligence, and make all life solemn and grand as the thought that "we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be well pleasing to Him." Nothing will so string the muscles for the fight, and free us from being entangled with the things of this life, as the ambition to "please Him who has called us to be soldiers."

Men have willingly flung away their lives for a couple



of lines of praise in a despatch, or for a smile from some great commander. Let us try to live and die so as to get "honourable mention" from our Captain. Praise from His lips is praise indeed. We shall not know how much it is worth, till the smile lights His face, and the love comes into His eyes, as He looks at us, and says, "Well done! good and faithful servant."

III. We have finally the fourfold streams or branches into which this general conception of Christian character parts itself.

There are four participial clauses here, which seem all to stand on one level, and to present an analysis in more detail of the component parts of this worthy walk. In general terms it is divided into fruitfulness in work, increase in knowledge, strength for suffering, and, as the climax of all, thankfulness.

The first element is—"bearing fruit in every good work." These words carry us back to what was said in ver. 6 about the fruitfulness of the gospel. Here the man in whom that word is planted is regarded as the producer of the fruit, by the same natural transition by which, in our Lord's Parable of the Sower, the men in whose hearts the seed was sown are spoken of as themselves on the one hand, bringing no fruit to perfection, and on the other, bringing forth fruit with patience. The worthy walk will be first manifested in the production of a rich variety of forms of goodness. All profound knowledge of God, and all lofty thoughts of imitating and pleasing Christ, are to be tested at last by their power to make men good, and that not after any monotonous type, nor on one side of their nature only.

One plain principle implied here is that the only true fruit is goodness. We may be busy, as many a man in our great commercial cities is busy, from Monday morning till Saturday night for a long lifetime, and may have had

to build bigger barns for our "fruits and our goods," and yet, in the high and solemn meaning of the word here, our life may be utterly empty and fruitless. Much of our work and of its results is no more fruit than the galls on the oak-leaves are. They are a swelling from a puncture made by an insect, a sign of disease not of life. The only sort of work which can be called fruit, in the highest meaning of the word, is that which corresponds to a man's whole nature and relations; and the only work which does so correspond is a life of loving service of God, which cultivates all things lovely and of good report. Goodness, therefore, alone deserves to be called fruit—as for all the rest of our busy lives, they and their toils are like the rootless, lifeless chaff that is whirled out of the threshing-floor by every gust. A life which has not in it holiness and loving obedience, however richly productive it may be in lower respects, is in inmost reality blighted and barren, and is "nigh unto burning." Goodness is fruit; all else is nothing but leaves.

Again: the Christian life is to be "fruitful in *every* good work." This tree is to be like that in the apocalyptic vision, which "bare twelve manner of fruits," yielding every month a different sort. So we should fill the whole circuit of the year with various holiness, and seek to make widely different forms of goodness our own. We have all certain kinds of excellence which are more natural and easier for us than others are. We should seek to cultivate the kind which is hardest for us. The thorn stock of our own character should bear not only grapes, but figs too, and olives as well, being grafted upon the true olive tree, which is Christ. Let us aim at this all-round and multi-form virtue, and not be like a scene for a stage, all gay and bright on one side, and dirty canvas and stretchers hung with cobwebs on the other.

The second element in the analysis of the true Christian

life is—"increasing in the knowledge of God." The figure of the tree is probably continued here. If it fruits, its girth will increase, its branches will spread, its top will mount, and next year its shadow on the grass will cover a larger circle. Some would take the "knowledge" here as the instrument or means of growth, and would render "increasing by the knowledge of God," supposing that, the knowledge is represented as the rain or the sunshine which minister to the growth of the plant. But perhaps it is better to keep to the idea conveyed by the common rendering, which regards the words "in knowledge" as the specification of that region in which the growth enjoined is to be realized. So here we have the converse of the relation between work and knowledge which we met in the earlier part of the chapter. There knowledge led to a worthy walk; here fruitfulness in good works leads to, or at all events is accompanied with, an increased knowledge. And both are true. These two work on each other a reciprocal increase. All true knowledge which is not mere empty notions, naturally tends to influence action, and all true action naturally tends to confirm the knowledge from which it proceeds. Obedience gives insight: "If any man wills to do My will, he shall know of the doctrine." If I am faithful up to the limits of my present knowledge, and have brought it all to bear on character and conduct, I shall find that in the effort to make my every thought a deed, there have fallen from my eyes as it were scales, and I see some things clearly that were faint and doubtful before. Moral truth becomes dim to a bad man. Religious truth grows bright to a good one, and whosoever strives to bring all his creed into practice, and all his practice under the guidance of his creed, will find that the path of obedience is the path of growing light.

Then comes the third element in this resolution of the Christian character into its component parts—"strength-

ened with all power, according to the might of His glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." Knowing and doing are not the whole of life: there are sorrow and suffering too.

Here again we have the Apostle's favourite "all," which occurs so frequently in this connexion. As he desired for the Colossians, *all* wisdom, unto *all* pleasing, and fruitfulness in *every* good work, so he prays for *all* power to strengthen them. Every kind of strength which God can give and man can receive, is to be sought after by us, that we may be "girded with strength," cast like a brazen wall all round our human weakness. And that Divine power is to flow into us, having this for its measure and limit—"the might of His glory." His "glory" is the lustrous light of His self-revelation, and the far-flashing energy revealed in that self-manifestation is the immeasurable measure of the strength that may be ours. True, my finite nature can never contain the infinite, but my finite nature is capable of indefinite expansion. Its elastic walls stretch to contain the increasing gift. The more we desire, the more we receive, and the more we receive, the more we are able to receive. The amount which filled our hearts to-day should not fill them to-morrow. Our capacity is at each moment the working limit of the measure of the strength given us. But it is always shifting, and may be continually increasing. The only real limit is "the might of His glory," the limitless omnipotence of the self-revealing God. To that we may indefinitely approach, and till we have exhausted God we have not reached the furthest point to which we should aspire.

And what exalted mission is destined for this wonderful communicated strength? Nothing that the world thinks great: only helping some lone widow to stay her heart in patience, and flinging a gleam of brightness, like sunrise on a stormy sea, over some tempest-tossed life. The strength

is worthily employed and absorbed in producing "all patience and longsuffering with joy." Again the favourite "all" expresses the universality of the patience and longsuffering. Patience here is not merely passive endurance. It includes the idea of perseverance in the right course, as well as that of uncomplaining bearing of evil. It is the "steering right onward," without bating one jot of heart or hope; the temper of the traveller who struggles forward, though the wind in his face dashes the sleet in his eyes, and he has to wade through deep snow. While "patience" regards the evil mainly as sent by God, and as making the race set before us difficult, "longsuffering" describes the temper under suffering considered as a wrong or injury done by man. And whether we think of our afflictions in the one or the other light, God's strength will steal into our hearts, if we will, to help us to bear them not merely with perseverance and with meekness as unruffled as Christ's, but will crown both graces—as the clouds are sometimes rimmed with flashing gold—with a great light of joy. That is the highest attainment of all. "Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." Flowers beneath the snow, songs in the night, fire burning beneath the water, "peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation," cool airs in the very crater of Vesuvius—all these paradoxes may be surpassed in our hearts if they are strengthened with all might by an indwelling Christ.

The crown of all, the last of these elements of the Christian character, is thankfulness—"giving thanks unto the Father." This is the summit of all; and is to be diffused through all. All our progressive fruitfulness and insight, as well as our perseverance and unruffled meekness in suffering, should have a breath of thankfulness breathed through them. We shall see the grand enumeration of the reasons for thankfulness in the next verses. Here we pause for the present, with this final constituent of the life

which Paul desired for the Colossian Christians, a constituent which was to be diffused through all the others. Thankfulness should mingle with all our thoughts and feelings, like the fragrance of some penetrating perfume through the common scentless air. It should embrace all events. It should be an operating motion in all actions. We should be clear-sighted and believing enough to be thankful for pain and disappointment and loss. That gratitude will add the crowning consecration to service and knowledge and endurance. It will touch our spirits to the finest of all issues, for it will lead to glad self-surrender, and make of our whole life a sacrifice of praise. "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice." Our lives will then exhale in fragrance and shoot up in flashing tongues of ruddy light and beauty, when kindled into a flame of gratitude by the glow of Christ's great love. Let us lay our poor selves on that altar, as sacrifices of thanksgiving; for with such sacrifices God is well-pleased.

A. MACLAREN.

---

#### CANON MOZLEY.

CANON MOZLEY was one of the most interesting and significant figures of the second generation of Tractarians; if not the deepest or the strongest, he was among the subtlest theologians of his day. He touched nothing that he did not in some measure disentangle; he could not or rather he would not follow any clue to the end. He had no ambition, intellectual, or other; he was content with a firm standing ground and a clear view; he did not wish to get on. If his character had a fault it was an instinctive severity to others who did wish to form systems and pursue careers. He pities a Bishop of Chichester for