

will not wait for a more distant death, but encounter the immediate one which his boldness makes too probable.

The important change in chap. xiv. 13-15 has already been alluded to.

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THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

XXI.

THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF THE PEACE OF CHRIST, THE WORD OF CHRIST, AND THE NAME OF CHRIST.

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to the which also ye were called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God. And whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”—Col. iii. 15-17 (Rev. Vers.).

THERE are here three precepts somewhat loosely connected, of which the first belongs properly to the series considered in our last paper, from which it is separated, only as not sharing in the metaphor under which the virtues contained in the former verses were set forth. In substance it is closely connected with them, though in form it is different, and in sweep is more comprehensive. The second refers mainly to Christian intercourse, especially to social worship; and the third covers the whole field of conduct, and fitly closes the series, which in it reaches the utmost possible generality, and from it drops to the inculcation of very special domestic duties. The three verses have each a dominant phrase round which we may group their teaching. These three are, the peace of Christ, the word of Christ, the name of the Lord Jesus.

I. The Ruling Peace of Christ.

The various reading “peace of Christ,” for “peace of

God," is not only recommended by manuscript authority, but has the advantage of bringing the expression into connexion with the great words of the Lord, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." A strange legacy to leave, and a strange moment at which to speak of His peace! It was but an hour or so since He had been "troubled in spirit," as He thought of the betrayer—and in an hour more He would be beneath the olives of Gethsemane; and yet, even at such a time, He bestows on his friends some share in His own deep repose of spirit. Surely "the peace of Christ" must mean what "My peace" meant, not only the peace which He gives, but the peace which lay, like a great calm on the sea, on His own deep heart; and surely we cannot restrict so solemn an expression to the meaning of mutual concord among brethren. That, no doubt, is included in it, but there is much more than that. Whatever made the strange calm which leaves such unmistakable traces in the picture of Christ drawn in the Gospels, may be ours. When He gave us His peace, He gave us some share in that meek submission of will to His Father's will, and in that stainless purity, which were its chief elements. The hearts and lives of men are made troubled, not by circumstances, but by themselves. Whoever can keep his own will in harmony with God's enters into rest, though many trials and sorrows may be his. Even if within and without are fightings, there may be a central "peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation." We are our own disturbers. The eager swift motions of our own wills keep us restless. Forsake these, and quiet comes. Christ's peace was the result of the perfect harmony of all His nature—all was co-operant to one great purpose; desires and passions did not war with conscience and reason, nor did the flesh lust against the Spirit. Though that complete uniting of all our inner selves in the sweet concord of perfect obedience is not attained on earth, yet its

beginnings are given to us by Christ, and in Him we may be at peace with ourselves, and have one great ruling power binding all our conflicting desires in one, as the moon draws after her the heaped waters of the sea.

We are summoned to improve that gift—to “let the peace of Christ” have its way in our hearts. And the surest way to increase our possession of it is to decrease our separation from Him. The fulness of our possession of His gift of peace depends altogether on our proximity to the Giver. It evaporates in carrying. It “diminishes as the square of the distance” from the source. So the exhortation to let it rule in us will be best fulfilled by keeping thought and affection in close union with our Lord.

This peace is to “rule” in our hearts. The figure contained in the word here translated *rule* is that of the umpire or arbitrator at the games, who, looking down on the arena, watches that the combatants strive lawfully, and adjudges the prize. Possibly the force of the figure may have been washed out of the word by use, and the “rule” of our rendering may be all that it means. But there seems no reason against keeping the full force of the expression, which adds picturesqueness and point to the precept. The peace of Christ, then, is to sit enthroned as umpire in the heart; or, if we might give a mediæval instead of a classical shape to the figure, that fair sovereign, Peace, is to be Queen of the Tournament, and her “eyes rain influence and adjudge the prize.” When contending impulses and reasons distract and seem to pull us in opposite directions, let her settle which is to prevail. How can the peace of Christ do that for us? We may make a rude test of good and evil by their effects on our inward repose. Whatever mars our tranquillity, ruffling the surface so that Christ’s image is no longer visible, is to be avoided. That stillness of spirit is very sensitive and shrinks away at the presence of an evil thing. Let it be for us what the barometer is to

a sailor, and if it sinks, let us be sure a storm is at hand. If we find that a given course of action tends to break our peace, we may be certain that there is poison in the draught which, as in the old stories, has been detected by the shivered cup, and should not drink any more. There is nothing so precious that it is worth while to lose the peace of Christ for the sake of it. Whenever we find it in peril, we must retrace our steps.

Then follows appended a reason for cultivating the peace of Christ "to which also ye were called in one body." The very purpose of God's merciful summons and invitation to them in the Gospel was that they might share in this peace. There are many ways of putting God's design in His call by the Gospel—it may be represented under many angles and from many points of view, and is glorious from all and each. No one word can state all the fulness to which we are called by His wonderful love, but none can be tenderer and more blessed than this thought, that God's great voice has summoned us to a share in Christ's peace. Being so called, all who share in it of course find themselves knit to each other by possession of a common gift. What a contradiction then, to be summoned in order to so blessed a possession, and not to allow it sovereign sway in moulding heart and life! What a contradiction, further, to have been gathered into one body by the common possession of the peace of Christ, and yet not to allow it to bind all the members in its sweet fetters with cords of love! The sway of the "peace of Christ" in our hearts will ensure the perfect exercise of all the other graces of which we have been hearing, and therefore this precept fitly closes the series of exhortations to brotherly affections, and seals all with the thought of the "one body" of which all these "new men" are members.

The very abruptness of the introduction of the next precept gives it force, "and be ye thankful," or, as we might

translate with an accuracy which perhaps is not too minute, "become thankful," striving towards deeper gratitude than you have yet attained. Paul is ever apt to catch fire as often as his thought brings him in sight of God's great love in drawing men to Himself, and in giving them such rich gifts. It is quite a feature of his style to break into sudden bursts of praise as often as his path leads him to a summit from which he catches a glimpse of that great miracle of love. This interjected precept is precisely like these sudden jets of praise. It is as if he had broken off for a moment from the line of his thought, and had said to his hearers—Think of that wonderful love of your Father God. He has called you from the midst of your heathenism, He has called you from a world of tumult and a life of troubled unrest to possess the peace which brooded ever, like the mystic dove, over Christ's head; He has called you in one body, having knit in a grand unity us, Jews and Gentiles, so widely parted before. Let us pause and lift up our voices in praise to Him. True thankfulness will well up at all moments, and will underlie and blend with all duties. There are frequent injunctions to thankfulness in this letter, and we have it again enjoined in the closing words of the verses which we are now considering, so that we may defer any further remarks till a later part of this article.

II. The Indwelling Word of Christ.

The main reference of this verse seems to be to the worship of the Church—the highest expression of their oneness. There are three points enforced in its three clauses, of which the first is the indwelling in the hearts of the Colossian Christians of the "word of Christ," by which is meant, as I conceive, not simply "the presence of Christ in the heart, as an inward monitor,"¹ but the indwelling of the definite body of truths contained in the gospel which had been preached to them. That gospel is the word of Christ,

¹ Lightfoot

inasmuch as He is its subject. These early Christians received that body of truth by oral teaching. To us it comes in the history of Christ's life and death, and in the exposition of the significance and far-reaching depth and power of these, which are contained in the rest of the New Testament—a very definite body of teaching. How can it abide in the heart? or what is the dwelling of that word within us but the occupation of mind and heart and will with the truth concerning Jesus revealed to us in Scripture? This indwelling is in our own power, for it is precept and not promise—and if we want to have it we must do with religious truth just what we do with other truths that we want to keep in our minds—ponder them, use our faculties on them, be perpetually recurring to them, fix them in our memories, like nails fastened in a sure place, and that we may remember them, “get them by heart,” as the children say. Few things are more wanting to-day than this. The popular Christianity of the day is strong in philanthropic service, and some phases of it are full of “evangelistic” activity, but it is woefully lacking in intelligent grasp of the great principles involved and revealed in the Gospel. Some Christians have yielded to the popular prejudice against “dogma,” and have come to dislike and neglect the doctrinal side of religion, and others are so busy in good works of various kinds that they have no time nor inclination to reflect nor to learn, and for others “the cares of this world and the lusts of other things, entering in, choke the word.” A merely intellectual Christianity is a very poor thing, no doubt; but that has been dinned into our ears so long and loudly for a generation now, that there is much need for a clear preaching of the other side—namely, that a merely emotional Christianity is a still poorer, and that if feeling on the one hand and conduct on the other are to be worthy of men with heads on their shoulders and brains in their heads, both feeling and conduct must be

built on a foundation of truth believed and pondered. In the ordered monarchy of human nature, reason is meant to govern, but she is also meant to submit, and for her the law holds good, she must learn to obey that she may be able to rule. She must bow to the word of Christ, and then she will sway aright the kingdom of the soul. It becomes us to make conscience of seeking to get a firm and intelligent grasp of Christian truth as a whole, and not to be always living on milk meant for babes, nor to expect that teachers and preachers should only repeat for ever the things which we know already.

That word is to dwell in Christian men *richly*. It is their own fault if they possess it, as so many do, in scant measure. It might be a full tide. Why in so many is it a mere trickle, like an Australian river in the heat, a line of shallow ponds with no life or motion, scarcely connected by a thread of moisture, and surrounded by great stretches of blinding shingle, when it might be a broad water—"waters to swim in?" Why, but because they do not do with this word, what all students do with the studies which they love?

The word should manifest the rich abundance of its dwelling in men by opening out in their minds into "every kind of wisdom." Where the gospel dwells in its power in a man's spirit, and is intelligently meditated on and studied, it will effloresce into principles of thought and action applicable to all subjects, and touching the whole round horizon of human life. All, and more than all, the wisdom which these false teachers promised in their mysteries, is given to the babes and the simple ones who treasure the word of Christ in their hearts, and the least among them may say, "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my meditation." That gospel which the child may receive, has "infinite riches in a narrow room," and, like some tiny black seed, for all its

humble form, has hidden in it the promise and potency of wondrous beauty of flower, and nourishment of fruit. Cultured and cared for in the heart where it is sown, it will unfold into all truth which a man can receive or God can give, concerning God and man, our nature, duties, hopes and destinies, the tasks of the moment, and the glories of eternity. He who has it and lets it dwell richly in his heart is wise; he who has it not, "at his latter end shall be a fool."

The second clause of this verse deals with the manifestations of the indwelling word in the worship of the Church. The individual possession of the word in one's own heart does not make us independent of brotherly help. Rather, it is the very foundation of the duty of sharing our riches with our fellows, and of increasing ours by contributions from their stores. And so—"teaching and admonishing one another" is the outcome of it. The universal possession of Christ's word involves the equally universal right and duty of mutual instruction.

We have already heard the Apostle declaring it to be his work to "admonish every man and to teach every man," and found that the former office pointed to practical ethical instruction, not without rebuke and warning, while the latter referred rather to doctrinal teaching. What he there claimed for himself, he here enjoins on the whole Christian community. We have here a glimpse of the perfectly simple, informal public services of the early Church, which seem to have partaken much more of the nature of a free conference than of any of the forms of worship at present in use in any Church. The evidence both of this passage and of the other Pauline Epistles, especially of the first Epistle to the Corinthians (xiv.) unmistakeably shows this. The forms of worship in the apostolic Church are not meant for models, and we do not prove a usage as intended to be permanent because

we prove it to be primitive ; but the principles which underlie the usages are valid always and everywhere, and one of these principles is the universal though not equal inspiration of Christian men, which results in their universal calling to teach and admonish. In what forms that principle shall be expressed, how safeguarded and controlled, is of secondary importance. Different stages of culture and a hundred other circumstances will modify these, and nobody but a pedant or religious martinet will care about uniformity. But I cannot but believe that the present practice of confining the public teaching of the Church to an official class has done harm. Why should one man be for ever speaking, and hundreds of people who are able to teach, sitting dumb to listen or pretend to listen to him? Surely there is a wasteful expenditure there. I hate revolution, and do not believe that any institutions, either political or ecclesiastical, which need violence to sweep them away, are ready to be removed ; but I believe that if the level of spiritual life were raised among us, new forms would naturally be evolved, in which there should be a more adequate recognition of the great principle on which the democracy of Christianity is founded, namely, "I will pour out My spirit on all flesh—and on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in these days of My Spirit, and they shall prophesy." There are not wanting signs that many different classes of Christian worshippers have ceased to find edification in the present manner of teaching. The more cultured write books on "the decay of preaching;" the more earnest take to mission halls and a "freer service," and "lay preaching"; the more indifferent stay at home. When the tide rises, all the idle craft stranded on the mud are set in motion ; such a time is surely coming for the Church, when the aspiration that has waited millenniums for its fulfilment, and received but a partial accomplishment at Pentecost,

shall at last be a fact: "would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!"

The teaching and admonishing is here regarded as being effected by means of song. That strikes one as singular, and tempts to another punctuation of the verse, by which "In all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another" should make a separate clause, and "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" should be attached to the following words. But probably the ordinary arrangement of clauses is best on the whole. The distinction between "psalms" and "hymns" appears to be that the former is a song with a musical accompaniment, and that the latter is vocal praise to God. No doubt the "psalms" meant were chiefly those of the Psalter, the Old Testament element in the early Christian worship, while the "hymns" were the new product of the spirit of devotion which had naturally broken into song, the first beginnings of the great treasure of Christian hymnody. "Spiritual songs" is a more general expression, including all varieties of Christian poesy, provided that they come from the Spirit moving in the heart. We know from many sources that song had a large part in the worship of the early Church. Indeed, whenever a great quickening of religious life comes, a great burst of Christian song comes with it. The onward march of the Church has ever been attended by music of praise; "as well the singers as the players on instruments" have been there. The mediæval Latin hymns cluster round the early pure days of the monastic orders; Luther's rough stormy hymns were as powerful as his treatises; the mystic tenderness and rapture of Charles Wesley's have become the possession of the whole Church—and so we hear from outside observers, that one of the practices of the early Christians which attracted heathen notice most was, that they assembled daily before it was

light, and "sang hymns of praise to one Christ as to a god."

These early hymns were of a dogmatic character. No doubt, just as in many a missionary Church, a hymn is found to be the best vehicle for conveying the truth, so it was in these early Churches, made up largely of slaves and women—both uneducated. "Singing the gospel" is a very old invention, though the name be new. The picture which we get here of the meetings of the early Christians is very remarkable. Evidently their gatherings were free and social, with the minimum of form, and that most elastic. If a man had any word of exhortation for the people, he might say on. "Every one of you hath a psalm, a doctrine." If a man had some fragment of an old psalm, or some strain that had come fresh from the Christian heart, he might sing it, and his brethren would listen. We do not have that sort of psalmody now. But what a long way we have travelled from it to a modern congregation, standing with hymn books that they scarcely look at, and "worshipping" in a hymn which half of them do not open their mouths to sing at all, and the other half do in a voice inaudible three pews off.

The best praise, however, is a heart song. So the Apostle adds "singing in your hearts unto God." And it is to be in "grace," that is to say, *in* it as the atmosphere and element in which the song moves, which is nearly equivalent to "by means of the Divine grace" which works in the heart, and impels to that perpetual music of silent praise. If we have the peace of Christ in our hearts, and the word of Christ dwelling in us richly in all wisdom, then an unspoken and perpetual music will dwell there too, "a noise like of a hidden brook" singing for ever its "quiet tune."

III. The all hallowing Name of Jesus.

From worship the Apostle passes to life, and crowns the entire series of injunctions with an all-comprehensive

precept, covering the whole ground of action. "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed"—then not merely worship, specially so called, but everything is to come under the influence of the same motive. That expresses emphatically the sanctity of common life, and extends the idea of worship to all deeds. "Whatsoever ye *do* in *word*"—then words are *doings*, and in many respects the most important of our doings. Some words, though they fade off the ear so quickly, outlast all contemporary deeds, and are more lasting than brass. Not only "the word of the Lord," but, in a very solemn sense, the word of man "endureth for ever."

Do all "in the name of the Lord Jesus." That means at least two things—in obedience to His authority, and in dependence on His help. These two are the twin talismans which change the whole character of our actions, and preserve us in doing them from every harm. That name hallows and ennobles all work. Nothing can be so small but this will make it great, nor so monotonous and tame but this will make it beautiful and fresh. The name now, as of old, casts out devils and stills storms. "For the name of the Lord Jesus" is the silken padding which makes our yokes easy. It brings the sudden strength which makes our burdens light. We may write it over all our actions. If there be any on which we dare not inscribe it, they are not for us.

Thus done in the name of Christ, all deeds will become thanksgiving, and so reach their highest consecration and their truest blessedness. "Giving thanks to God the Father through Him" is ever to accompany the work in the name of Jesus. The exhortation to thanksgiving, which is in a sense the Alpha and the Omega of the Christian life, is perpetually on the Apostle's lips, because thankfulness should be in perpetual operation in our hearts. It is so important because it presupposes all-important things, and because it

certainly leads to every Christian grace. For continual thankfulness there must be a continual direction of mind towards God and towards the great gifts of our salvation in Jesus Christ. There must be a continual going forth of our love and our desire to these, that is to say—thankfulness rests on the reception and the joyful appropriation of the mercies of God, brought to us by our Lord. And it underlies all acceptable service and all happy obedience. The servant who thinks of God as a harsh exactor is slothful; the servant who thinks of Him as the “giving God” rejoices in toil. He who brings his work in order to be paid for it, will get no wages, and turn out no work worth any. He who brings it because he feels that he has been paid plentiful wages beforehand, of which he will never earn the least mite, will present service well pleasing to the Master.

So we should keep thoughts of Jesus Christ, and of all we owe to Him, ever before us in our common work, in shop and mill and counting house, in study and street and home. We should try to bring all our actions more under their influence, and, moved by the mercies of God, should yield ourselves living thank-offerings to Him, who is the sin-offering for us. If, as every fresh duty arises, we hear Christ saying, “This do in remembrance of me,” all life will become a true communion with Him, and every common vessel shall be as a sacramental chalice, and on the bells of the horses shall be the same inscription as on the high priest’s mitre—“Holiness to the Lord.” To lay work on that altar sanctifies both the giver and the gift. Presented through Him, by whom all blessings come to man and all thanks go to God, and kindled by the flame of gratitude, our poor deeds, for all their grossness and earthliness, shall go up in curling wreaths of incense, an odour of a sweet smell acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

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