

Watchfulness.

BY THE REV. B. F. WESTCOTT, D.D., CANON OF WESTMINSTER.

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them."—HEB. ii. 1.

EVERYONE who has made the least endeavour to live for God will know by experience how many and how grievous are the temptations which hinder his progress—temptations to acquiesce in some secondary end, to relax the strenuousness of labour, to follow the promptings of his own will to look earthwards. He will know, therefore, that the spirit of the Christian towards himself must be watchfulness—watchfulness the most open-eyed and the most far-seeing. The Christian will be watchful, lest any attractiveness of a special object, any occupation with a transitory taste, should obscure his vision of the supreme object of life, or turn him aside from his own special work. He will be watchful lest a sense of a partial attainment should seem to be an invitation to repose and not an encouragement to fresh toil. He will be watchful lest any confidence brought by experience should lead him to substitute trust in his own judgment for simple self-surrender to a present Lord. He will be watchful lest the changed circumstances of his conflict should persuade him to think that the cross of Christ has been already exchanged for a crown, and that he may expect a welcome which was not given to his Lord. He will be watchful, in other words, over his aim and over his efforts; he will be watchful lest he should lose at any moment the support of a divine companionship and the inspiration of Christ's example.

He will be watchful over his aim. There is, indeed, one aim for all men—to grow into the likeness of God, but this general aim becomes individualised for every man. The complete likeness, so to speak, belongs to humanity, and each man contributes his peculiar part to the whole. His resemblance to others lies in the completeness of his consecration; and his difference from others follows directly from it. Something he has, however insignificant it may seem to be to our eyes—something he has which belongs to himself alone, and this he brings to Christ in sure trust that it

represents the fulfilment of his special office. He may not see how it will subserve to the execution of the august design which he dimly discerns, but he can commit it to the great Master Builder without one doubt that He will use the work which He has inspired.

The aim, then, to which, as Christians, we shall all unceasingly bend our energies is the attainment of the divine likeness, by the devout use of that which we are, and of that which naturally belongs to us. Nothing is required of us which lies either above or beyond our position or our powers; but it is required that we should bring what we have, without reserve and without misgiving, to Him to whom every most secret wish has an articulate voice. It is required of us that we should strive to show the glory of God in our proper place and our proper work. In these lie our divine calling, and every day shows us how sorely we all need this confidence in our appointed task. What this task is the soul knows, and the soul knows also when we turn aside from it, and why; for we do too often turn aside from it. Few temptations, indeed, are more subtle and more perilous than that which leads us to a restless search for some task which is more fruitful, as we think, or more conspicuous, or more attractive than that which lies ready before us; and it may happen that a self-chosen path will bring us renown and gratitude. But no splendid labours in other fields can supply the defect which must henceforth remain for ever through our faithlessness if we leave undone just that little thing which God had prepared for us to do. The loss is irreparable, not only to ourselves, but even, in some sense, to the whole Church of Christ. At the same time, the humblest worker, while he jealously guards his post, will keep ever present before him the sublime ideal which, in God's way, he seeks to realise. He also, as we have been already reminded to-day, is a fellow-worker with God, and as long as he feels this divine fellowship no pomp of circumstance can add to the dignity of his toil, and no outward obscurity can take from it. He may be set in

what seems to others and to himself to be a desolate wilderness; but when his eyes are opened he will cry with glad surprise like the patriarch, "The Lord is in this place, and I knew it not".

The Christian, then, will ask himself unweariedly whether he allows any selfish purpose to eclipse, even partially, his proper aim; whether he uses gifts or opportunities which promise no immediate return no less faithfully than those which bring the joy of visible success; whether in the midst of his common cares, under the pressure of a monotonous routine it may be, he fixes his gaze from time to time on the heaven which is about him and not only above him, and "endures as seeing Him who is invisible".

The Christian will be watchful over his aim, and he will be watchful also over his efforts. It is as true that God gives nothing as it is that He gives all things. He accords to man the privilege of making his own that which He bestows freely, and He requires man to use the privilege. Nothing avails us which we have not actually appropriated. A character cannot be bestowed like a position. A character must be wrought out in the actual conflicts of life. We are, indeed, inclined to suppose that the laws which we recognise in the growth of physical and intellectual power have no application to things moral and spiritual, as though in this case endeavour and discipline had no place. To state such an opinion plainly is to refute it. It would be as reasonable to think that we could read by earnestly wishing to read as to think that complicated moral problems can be solved by spontaneous good-will. Life, indeed, brings to us the rudiments of spiritual teaching, but these need to be carefully studied, and, above all, to be brought into the light of our faith, not once only or twice, but as often as we are called to act or to judge; for though every attainment which is conformed to our ideal partakes of its eternal nobility, no solution of yesterday can be used directly to-day. Life, with all its questions, is new every morning. At the same time, the solution of yesterday leaves us in a favourable position to deal with the novel data. The quickened sense of duty is a new force. There can be no discharge in our warfare; but every conflict faithfully and patiently borne leaves us stronger to overcome fresh difficulties. And each period of life has its task and its gift, like each place. Youth

cannot anticipate the calm vision of age, and age cannot discharge its office by recalling the enthusiasm of youth; but that vision gives definiteness to his enthusiasm, and that enthusiasm floods the evening vision with living light. We must, then, all, if we are true servants, do our proper work to-day. The present moment is eternal. It gathers into itself all the past, it folds in itself all the future. As we use it, we are and we shall be; and our reward is already included in our effort. "I laboured more than all," the Apostle writes, and St. Bernard adds: "He does not say, 'I was of more service than all,' or 'I bore more fruit than all'. No; God had taught him that each man shall receive according to his toil, and not according to his success. Though God gives no increase, no care of the husbandman is lost. God will return it, and that toil is free from all anxiety which no failure can make of none effect." The words surely breathe unspeakable encouragement, and justify themselves. It may be that at the very time when we sow we know that we shall never see the ripe harvest. But what then? Is there any greater joy than to feel that we, in our turn, have provided something for others to reap, even as we ourselves have entered into the labours of our fathers?

The Christian, then, will ask himself again and again whether his work costs him serious exertion; whether it exercises the fulness of his powers; whether he faces fresh duties as they arise with more and more strenuous endeavour because he uses the experience of the past to assist his thought, and not to supersede it; whether at every point he has gained the highest within his reach, or has at least refused to rest on a lower level; and whether he has taken to heart day by day the words of the psalm which from time immemorial has given the keynote of public worship: "To-day, if ye will hear His voice"—for that Voice is not, as we are too ready to believe, a tradition only, a sweet memorial enshrined in sacred books, but a living voice sounding in our ears with messages of truth, which earlier generations could not hear, and calls to action which we first are able to obey.

The Christian will be watchful over his efforts. He will, therefore, be watchful, above all things, lest he lose the abiding sense of the divine companionship which is his strength, the sense of the present revelation of a Heavenly Father, the living

voice of a living God. We can, indeed, gain our appointed end only so far as we catch that Voice from hour to hour, and pass from lesson to lesson as they are brought to us through the interpretation of our achievements and our failures, of the duties which are involved in our changing position and the obligations which attach to our accumulated gifts, for the will of God for each one of us is not contained in the letter of any fixed command. It is apprehended more fully and fully through the spiritual exercises of each day, just as we learn the mind of a friend in the natural intercourse of soul with soul. We obey it best, not by any scrupulous observance of multitudinous rules, but by the self-surrender of reverent affection. Such affection passes, through word and sign, to the Lord Himself, and seeks in the personal knowledge of Him the vital law which meets all the facts of life, and the unfailing grace which gives to love the blessing of spontaneous obedience.

In this way, by ever watchful listening, we shall come to realise naturally, in the way of life and not of speculative truths, the offices of God for us as Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier. We shall know that we are indeed His and not our own; know that the conquest of our self-will and self-seeking cost nothing less than the death of His Son; know that as we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus, the virtue of the offered life of the Son of Man, cleanseth us from all sin. We shall grasp the scope of our duties with new force, we shall recognise the consequences of our sins with new clearness, we shall find our greatest hope flooded with new light, and in the ordinary course of daily action the sense of the divine presence will be a power to restrain, and to strengthen, and to inspire, even when we do not consciously reflect upon it.

Our own experience shows us the need of this watchfulness, of this habitual realisation of the presence of God about us; but the example of Christ brings the necessity before us with a most impressive solemnity. He, too, though He was Son, was made perfect by suffering. He, too, learned obedience by making His Father's will His own. He, too, in each crisis of His ministry is shown praying, that in the pattern of His sinless manhood we may learn the strength of our own, for He calls His disciples to follow His steps. Submission, discipline, effort, must go before re-

pose. "Take My yoke upon you," He says, "and learn of Me, and ye shall find rest for your souls." The yoke must be taken, the lesson must be learned, and then comes the great reward. The self-surrendering service of God is found to be not only perfect freedom, but true sovereignty, through which the believer is enabled to use every faculty with which he is endowed for the good of all to whom his influence reaches.

And this sovereignty of service is for all. Every great thought on which we have touched during the last month, every hope, every blessing, the joy of fruitful labour, and the assurance of a divine fellowship, is part of the common heritage of Christianity. Life is more than—ininitely more than—the circumstances of life. Where God is felt to be—in the lonely garret or the crowded thoroughfare—there is heaven; and, indeed, "God is not far from any one of us". To seek Him, to see Him, to rest in Him—to accomplish, in other words, the destiny of man—is not the special privilege of the rich, or the noble, or the wise. It is the birthright of the humblest and simplest believer, sealed to him in his baptism; and I will venture to say there is no one among us here who has not in calm moments known for what he was made, and known that the purpose of God is a promise to those who believe in Him, and justify their faith by watchfulness and prayer.

Guild Prize Competitions.

EXAMINATION PAPERS.

(Answers must be received by the 15th November.)

I.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS.

1. Relate very briefly the chief historical events from the Return to the end of the Old Testament.
2. Who were the Scribes?
3. "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain": explain the origin of that worship.

II.

THE LIFE OF THE APOSTLE PETER.

1. Describe St. Peter's birthplace.
2. What would be the nature and extent of his education?
3. What relatives of his are mentioned in the New Testament?

Books recommended are: (1) *The Historical Connection between the Old and New Testaments*, by Rev. John Skinner. (2) *The Life of the Apostle Peter*, by the Rev. Professor Salmond. Clark. 6d. each.

Prizes will be given for the best Paper read at any Church Guild meeting; and for the best Syllabus of Guild Religious Work for the Session 1889-90. Syllabuses must be received by the 15th December. Prizes will be given to successful Candidates every month.