

SERMON PREACHED TO THE NURSES' ASSOCIATIONS.

By the REV. PAKENHAM WALSH,

22nd Sunday after Trinity, 1912.

● IN BISHOP COTTON SCHOOL CHAPEL, BANGALORE.

Phil. 1. 5.—I thank my God...for your fellowship in furtherance of the gospel.

IN his dark, lonely, desolate prison St. Paul was full of a wonderful joy, a joy that poured itself out in all his prayers. It was the joy of remembering the little band of converts at Philippi, and how they were working for the spread of the Kingdom of Christ. They had entered into a sacred fellowship of service with him and with Christ, and now that he, the enthusiastic missionary, had to lie inactive month after month in Caesar's dungeon, he knew that his work was going on by the message of many mouths and the testimony of many lives, and so he wrote to them in supreme joy this Epistle of exultation. Their fellowship with him was one of *Sympathy*. The work next his heart was the work next their heart. They lived for this, and they listened for every tidings of him and of his labours, because they so longed to hear of the advance of that sacred cause. Time and again when he was in need they had sent to him out of their own poverty (*Phil. 4.16*). It was also a fellowship of *Suffering*. He had suffered in the cause in their very town, had had his back torn with Roman scourges, and had lain in prison with his feet stretched in the stocks; and they had suffered too, in prison, in prestige, in property (*Phil. 1.29,30*). It was thirdly a fellowship in *Service*. Day by day they were carrying on the work he had begun, and gathering in souls into the church. They were "shining as lights in the world, and holding forth the word of life" (*Phil. 2. 16*).

And do not these words from our Epistle for to-day come with especial appropriateness at a gathering of members of the Nurses' Missionary League.*

I feel that I may say as voicing the thought of many missionaries throughout God's harvest field, "I thank my God for your fellowship in furtherance of the gospel." It is a fellowship, like theirs, with us missionaries, and with our common Lord; it is a fellowship like theirs of sympathy, of suffering, and of service; it has, as its object as theirs had the extension of the kingdom of God.

One can imagine how St. Paul would have rejoiced had he been able to see what we see—the wonderful advance of the forces of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit against the evils and miseries of pain and of disease. He would have rejoiced at the growth of medical

* [Nurses Associations. It was not a Missionary Conference—ED.]

knowledge, skill, and appliances; at the unlocking of so many new resources of God in nature for the alleviation of human sickness; at the marvellous improvements in our hospitals and in our care of the sick; at the research which has discovered the causes of so many diseases, and at the wisdom which has devised means to prevent them; at the inestimable boon of anæsthesia; at the enhanced security afforded by antiseptic treatment; at the amelioration effected by improved sanitation; at the advantages to diagnosis and operation resulting from the discovery of the X rays; at the unfolding of the therapeutic properties of light and of electricity; still more would he have rejoiced that Christian nations had brought these blessings of healing to the darkened and diseased lives of the millions in Asia and Africa whose need was so great, and that in most cases this medical skill had come as a direct ally of the Christian faith.

But most of all he would have rejoiced at the missionary spirit in the medical world, at the spirit which animates such a league as yours. He would have rejoiced in that noble band of nurses, of whom you form a part, who, definitely laying their trained skill at the Master's feet, have made the central object of their lives the extension of his Kingdom, and are either serving him on the foreign field in the nursing of the sick who know him not, but come to know him through their love and testimony; or, while caring for his sick brethren at home, are still forwarding by prayer and by sympathy the extension of his Kingdom throughout the world.

And it seems to me a solemn thing to speak specially to you who are brought daily into contact with the sickness and suffering of the world, to you who realize more than we can, how vast is the sum of that misery, and how dreadful is that pain; to you who realize that you are fellow-workers with one who came to abolish that suffering and that pain, and is working his purpose out as rapidly as our slow faith and our dull obedience will suffer Him. I am to speak in his name to you who are his fellow-workers, to you whose daily privilege it is to stand beside Him in sickness and bring relief to Him in the person of his sick brethren.

Shall we then consider this morning His relation to suffering and to sickness, and seek to view these things more from his standpoint and less from our own?

I. And first I notice that he Himself was never ill. It is almost certain that had it been so it would have been recorded. Our Lord's body as well as His soul was in a state of perfect abounding health. And yet, remembering that he was every whit man, we feel sure that

his body was as capable of sickness as is ours; it was exposed and liable to infection, just as his soul was exposed to the temptation of sin. Whence then his marvellous health? Was it not that he lived such a life of faith and of communion with His Father, that no sickness which might mar his life could lay hold on him. The joy of His Father's presence and of doing His will, the peace of leaving everything with God, the spotless holiness which made the whole life harmonious, simple and controlled; these would serve as a guard against all pollution of the body; and in moments of danger, as when he grasped the leper or laid hands on those full of infectious diseases, His faith in God's power to keep him would banish and drive away all attacks of sickness.

And yet "he suffered," where the interests of the Kingdom required it, he was willing to hunger, to thirst, to be weary, and when the pathway marked out by God led to the most cruel suffering we can think of—he gladly gave his pure body to the agonies of the cross. The blood dropped from his forehead as he prayed in agony; the blood flowed from scourged back, torn hands, lacerated brow, and pierced side; and every pang was redemptive. He endured no useless, he shrank from no useful suffering—that may be said to sum up His attitude to pain in His own person.

II. Then I notice that his attitude to sickness in others was one of uncompromising hostility. He was the enemy of disease of the body as much as he was the enemy of sin of the soul. If it is said that he bore our sins, it is likewise said that he bore our diseases, (Is. 53.4. R.V.M., Matt 8.17) both the Hebrew and Greek distinctly say so. To all who sought Him in faith healing flowed out from him. Contact with Him meant health and recovery, and that of every kind of disorder, mental and bodily, nervous and organic, curable and incurable. The only indications we are given as to how he regarded sickness are his words in healing the woman who was bent double—"this daughter of Abraham whom satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years", and the words of St. Luke in Acts 10.38 "who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil." It seems a correct inference, and corroborated by the fact that sickness is nowhere spoken of in the Bible as sent by God, that Our Lord regarded sickness as, directly or indirectly the work of the devil, and regarded Himself as our Saviour from it. The very word "save" is used alike of the healing of the soul and of the body.

III. When we come, thirdly, to consider his commandments to His disciples as regards sickness, we are on still firmer ground. He gave them His power, or more correctly He gave them authority to use

His power both for their own preservation (Luke 10. 19, Mar. 16. 18), and for the healing of the sick (Matt 10. 1. etc.) He promised them that the works he did they should do also (Jo. 14. 12.) The Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles are full of the record of the exercise of that gift. St. Paul's faith is such that it triumphs over a deadly viper's poison in his own body, (Acts 28. 3, 6) and over the broken bones and battered muscles of his bodily frame after he had been stoned (Acts 14. 19, 20.) The healing of the sick by prayer, by laying on of hands, by anointing with oil, is a commonplace of Christianity, and so far from their being any indication that the power is to cease in the Christian Church, or the gift to be withdrawn, there is a clear command given by St. James that in cases of sickness the presbyters are to be sent for and are to exercise the ministry of prayer and anointing over the sick for their recovery. (Jas. 5, 14, 15) The whole history of the Church through the ages tends to prove that wherever the gift has been claimed in faith, there the same power has graciously manifested itself, and our own days have seen, not a return of a lost gift, but a strengthening of a weak faith, with the inevitable result that cases of healing by faith are numerous on every side of us.

On the other hand the same principle, which we observed as true in Christ, holds true of His members. Some suffering and sickness is permitted in the interests of the Kingdom. St. Paul, with all his wonderful faith, is bidden to endure "the stake in the flesh," and though he recognises it as "from Satan", he also recognises that Christ's strength will be made more perfect in his weakness as he bears this disease, than it would be in his deliverance from it (2 Cor. 12.7-9). A similar reason may explain why he had to leave Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Tim. 4.20).

May we not come then to these conclusions about sickness? That Christ came to deliver our bodies from sickness as well as our souls from disease. That the only suffering we need undergo is such as will be useful for His kingdom, and that we may claim deliverance, for ourselves and for others who believe, from all useless and injurious suffering and sickness. That his gift of healing is available for us as in the first days, in proportion to our faith, and that the Risen Christ is with us as really and as certainly to cure the sick, as when He lived and walked on earth and stretched out His hands to heal. And if these are our conclusions, should not our praises and our prayers harmonise with them? overflowing joy that Divine Healing is a present reality; earnest prayer that we and others may have faith to lay hold on this gift.

And may I not in conclusion say to you, whose daily life brings you face to face with this and similar problems, that the nearer your lives are brought to Jesus, the more you abound in faith to Him, in love to you fellow-men, in hope in the wonderful working of God, the greater will be your power to help the bodies and the souls of sufferers?

Yea more, and that your own bodies will be more abundantly full of life and of health for his service? Who knows but that some hands here, that hitherto have gently moved, at the impulse of His love, in relieving and soothing pain and suffering, may be empowered with spiritual might to bring the very healing of Christ to the afflicted ones? It is a gift of the Spirit given to whom He will, and we have apostolic authority for "desiring earnestly the greater gifts" (1 Cor. XII-31.) But whether that gift be ours or no, the "more excellent way"—the way of love is open to us all, and so I conclude in prayer for you and for all your League in the concluding words of our Epistle:—

"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge, and all discernments; so that ye may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."

To seek to be saved by patience, meekness, humility of heart, and resignation to God, is truly coming to God through Christ; and when these tempers live and abide in you, as the spirit and aim of your life then Christ is in you of a truth, and the life that you then lead is not yours, but Christ that liveth in you.—*William Law*.

NOTICE.

Will members, who have changed their address, or are about to do so, kindly send new address to the Honorary Secretaries. It is *most important* that they should have members correct addresses for publication in the Handbook.

M. R. HENRY.