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THE
CHURCHMAN

JANUARY, 1893.

ART. I.—LESSONS FROM THE CHARACTER OF THE
MOTHER OF OUR LORD.

A QUIET DAY ADDRESS.

Part II.—Reverence for Independence and Self-Suppression.

NEED I remind you that one quality of the Christian minister for his work must be meekness? "In meekness," says the Apostle, "in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves." And this meekness is the meekness which has its root in faith, since it is a meekness which is strong in this, that it does not lose sight of God's secret working and God's loving purpose for the souls of men. It remembers Him who can soften the heart and guide the spirit. It is a meekness exercised in the reverent recollection of Him who can give them repentance by the acknowledgment of the truth, and the power of recovery from the snares and perils which surround them. And ought not the remembrance of the work which God is doing towards souls to stay our harshness, and turn our haste into meek patience? Ought not meekness in us to be allied with the recognition of the great Divine purposes, which are not always known to us, seeing that He leads blind souls by paths that they know not, and fulfils Himself in many ways? Would not calmness of trust and tenderness towards struggling souls be ours if we could live more in the recognition of God's purposes, and less for the thought of our own will? Would not the gift of a higher sagacity also be ours if we could thus show forth our work of ministry with the meekness of wisdom?

II. It is here that we may fittingly pass to the second feature of the Virgin's character which I have noted, viz., Reverence for the individual Independence of Souls. Let us call to mind two scenes. The first is the scene in the temple.

After three days' search Mary and Joseph found our Lord there. The mother breaks out into the natural expostulation, "Why hast Thou thus dealt with us?" The answer of our Lord lays down the principle that each soul has its mission, given it of God, which must be sought and fulfilled: "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"—or "in My Father's house?" It does not matter which reading we adopt; the principle either way is the principle that the spirit must seek its purpose and duty. It is the gentle hint of His own independence—or say, rather, of the all-prevalence of the call which is higher than the call of earth.

It was an answer which perplexed Mary, but it gave to her the clue to the life of her Son. She saw that she must not expect always to direct that the mode in which He would reveal His mission and work would be the mode and fashion she might have expected or even wished. Mary may have shared some of those thoughts and expectations which filled the minds of the disciples. It is, at any rate, safe, I think, to say that she probably was saturated with the same class of Messianic expectations which were accepted so widely by the country men and country women. She could hardly divest her mind of the material hopes which had interpenetrated the national life and thought. But however that may have been, she early learns that the mode of His manifestation was beyond her control or direction; that she must be content to stand aside and watch the slow development of a Divine working which wrought independent of her human expectations and tender solicitude. Here is the beautiful trait of her character, that she did so quickly apprehend this thing. She realized that the Divine power and wisdom must work in its own way; she realized, even though she did not understand fully, the working of the Divine power; she kept a sweet watchfulness and a true reverence for it alive in her heart.

Recall now the other scene, the marriage at Cana of Galilee. Note how clear and calm is her perception. She accepts His words, and understands that He will work His work in His own way and at His own time. Her reverence for the Divine working and her trust in the Divine methods is complete.

And the lesson remains for us. Our earnestness for the good of souls sometimes betrays us into an eager desire to overdirect their growing life; we are right, emphatically right, when we seek to lead them to the perception of the highest and deepest truths we know. But may we not mistake the method for the truth, the form for the reality? May we not imagine that the steps of their development must be just like our own, or exactly after the fashion of our expectations? May we not in the very pressure of our zeal forget

that beside ourselves there is another working in the hearts of men, and that that other is God? Do we not too often leave out of our calculation the truth, which I think is being slowly forgotten by the Church, that God the Holy Ghost is the Lord, and that He is the giver of life; and that therefore when the life of Christ forms itself in human souls, it forms itself after the order and method, not of our thoughts, but of His wisdom, who divides to every man severally as He will? His order is not the stiff and meagre order of our little garden plot, but the wide and varied order of the kingdom of life. He has differing missions for the differing capacities of men. He has different modes of maturing men's souls for the work to which they are destined. We like to pattern the souls committed to our care after our pattern, perchance. He works in stronger ways, and sometimes we are tempted to regard His ways as strange; we fail to realize that they are His ways. Souls seem to us to be going wrong. Why do they thus or thus? And yet, perhaps, this is the way the Spirit leads them, and thus they are finding their way to the mission before them. Is it not well that we should recognise that after all souls are not *ours*, but God's? We may plant and sow, and nourish and pray, but finally and truly, the souls of men belong neither to Paul, nor Apollos, nor Kephass; but they are Christ's. And being His, we must be prepared for, and be ready even to smile trustfully upon, their ripening in unexpected ways. They have learned, perhaps, all we have to teach. God leads them to other teachers, that so they may grow up to Him in all things, which is the Head. Christ's—not man's—such is the Christian. We, like the Blessed Virgin, may sometimes be perplexed, troubled, at the unexpected changes and developments in the lives and characters of those we have cared for. But, let us have the reverent Spirit which recognises that the Divine power is at work, and will work in His own way. Let us remember that we do not, and cannot, do all the work which needs to be done in the forming of Christ in the hearts of men. We are not the only workers; we are fellow-workers with another, and that other is God. He works all things after the good pleasure of His will. To realize this is to gain a patient and tranquil spirit, a larger and a more stalwart faith. It will deliver us from the pettiness of personal irritation and wounded vanity, and from the gloom of a needless and faithless despair. We shall thus more humbly rely upon God, and more reverently regard the souls of those whom God has committed to our charge.

The Intellectual Integrity of which I have spoken as a feature of the character of the Mother of our Lord is closely allied (I think, at least), psychologically speaking, with the

feature we have noticed—the reverent regard for the independence of souls.

It may seem strange to speak of Intellectual Integrity as a feature of character. But let me explain what I mean. There is a moral integrity which we do understand. It is the integrity which makes a man refuse to stain or tarnish his honour by unworthy deeds. It touches the departments of life in which we have dealings with our fellow men, and in which to speak truth, to be just and true in all our dealing, and to be honourable in word or deed, are the simple requirements of an upright character. But there is an integrity which is of a rarer kind; it is the integrity which insists upon a scrupulous truthfulness in the domain of our thoughts. There are hundreds of men who would not cheat their neighbours in commerce or goods, who yet cheat themselves in the formation of their opinions. There are hundreds of men who would take the most anxious pains to make the minutest examination rather than run the risk of overcharging their fellow men, who yet adopt views upon the most important subjects with a light heart and a heedless brain. There are many who would denounce the sale of inferior and adulterated goods as a fraud and a sin, who think it no wrong to offer to the world as their final conclusions on matters of sacred truth and supreme importance raw, rash and ill-considered statements which they have hastily gleaned from chance quarters, or greedily grasped because they made little demand upon the mind. Such people lack intellectual integrity. It is a sore loss; and the evil which it engenders is a terrible evil. It is a prevalent evil. Few, very few, are free from the infection of it. We see it in the haste which cuts the knot it has not the patience to untie. But intellectual integrity is patient, and can think and wait.

Observe its presence in the Virgin Mary. It is almost the most prominent characteristic of her disposition. Certainly the Evangelist calls attention to it. Klein speaks of her as sceptical in her mental habits. We should not care to use words which might mislead. But there is a good scepticism as well as a bad. There is the doubt which fears to go astray, and which anxiously seeks what is true, grudging no pains and no prolonged reflection to reach it. There is a doubt which distrusts haste in arriving at conclusions. If this be intended, we can have no objection to assigning that spirit to the mother of our Lord, for the story tells of her wise and reverent hesitation, her earnest desire to probe things to the bottom, and to reach the truths about them and a true understanding of them. You remember the verse (Luke ii. 19). But Mary, amid all the bewilderment of the people at the

time, in contrast with the astonished and rapid actions of others (*συνέτηρει*), kept—or rather was keeping, kept keeping—these things, pondering them (*συμβάλλουσα*), turning them over in her heart. So after the scene in the Temple: His parents understood not the saying. But his mother kept—but again the word is stronger: was keeping faithfully, or was watching closely (*διέτηρει*)—all these sayings in her heart.

Here was the disposition which kept watchful and waited till the true significance of what was said and done declared itself. She was not afraid of suspense; she could do without rushing to a conclusion. Her reverent intellect would not adopt hasty judgments or rash views. This is what I mean by intellectual integrity. Psychologically it was allied to the spirit which regarded and revered the independence of others, and could acquiesce in the development of her Son's mission in His own way. Being upright in mind, carefully and patiently truthful, she could understand that the spiritual maturing of others might proceed upon unexpected lines. High truthfulness of mind led to a reverent toleration of the rights of others. The patient caution of her thoughts gave her a vigilant sagacity, and an instinct respecting the Divine purpose and method of working.

It is the opposite spirit—the spirit of haste and impatience; the spirit which cannot keep things in reserve till their meanings become clear; the spirit which urges men to talk of what they do not understand, and to be ambitious of possessing opinions on topics which they have never considered, which destroys the sweet peacefulness of disposition out of which charity grows, and in which the power of ministry may ripen and mature with deeper and truer force than can ever be reached by those whose teaching is little more than the blustering *rechauffées* of miserable handbooks, complete guides, and ready compendiums of so-called religious truth.

Much of this would disappear if this patience of honest thought took possession of our spirits more and more. But real study is rare; we are not a reading people, and the studious habit is less and less among us. And if study is rare, thoughtfulness in study is yet rarer, and honesty in the exercise of thought is rarest of all. And this being so, and lack of studiousness a national failing, let us who are of the clergy—whose function is to teach—set the example of calm, industrious thoughtfulness, nay, anxious reflectiveness, lest by hurried utterances we disturb the faith of our people and the peace of the Church. Only that which is true in the name of the Lord should we speak; and therefore we should speak only what is true in the sense that not only we think it, but we have thought it out; not only that we have studied about

it, but that we have studied it—the very thing in question; and that, having studied, we ponder and turn over the question in its various bearings. This habit will produce another quality, viz., alertness to observe, and courage to question. The mother of our Lord sets the example of this spirit and habit. Is it the message of the angel? Is it the action of simple shepherds? Is it the speech of the child Christ? Mary thinks, treasures, and considers all. Like Mary, we shall find the value of casting in our mind the meaning of what we hear. Everything comes with profit to such an one.

Here is that truthfulness of habit which goes far to sustain calmness of spirit, and which delivers men from the agitations and impatient alarms of little-thinking impulsiveness and narrow-minded omniscience. Cultivate, cultivate—it is life and safety to yourselves, your people, and the Church—this strong, noble intellectual integrity.

III. There is *Self-Suppression*. The mother of our Lord appears but little in the sacred story. A few verses cover all the record of her. Her very name is only mentioned five times by St. Matthew and only seven times by St. Luke; and these mentions of her are mainly in the earlier chapters. After the narrative of the birth and early years is ended, the figure of Mary almost disappears. We feel its naturalness. This woman with her sweet reasonableness had no noisy self-assertion nor eager self-vaunting in her nature. She appears but seldom, and then only when she is needed. She intervenes at the marriage of Cana because her kindly and quick perception sees the need of the moment, and she would avert the humiliation of the hosts. She appears only once besides during Christ's life of active ministry; but it is fear for His fatigue. We find her at the cross; it is her right and her mother's sympathy which bring her there. All through the story we feel that it reflects truthfully, both in what it says and in what it does not say, the noble self-suppression of her, the Virgin Mother. There is no eagerness to be in the front, just as there is no cowardliness which hangs in the background. The measure of her appearance is the need of the moment—the help of word or sympathy which she can give. It is the measure which a true and simple heart uses in all life. There is no thought of self, and therefore, save where others need her, she seeks no prominence, and then only the prominence which is unavoidable for those who are forward in doing good. This, in a sense, is her chiefest virtue; it is that feature which guarantees the purity of other virtues; it is the quality which belongs to the honest and good heart which brings forth fruit, not to self, but to the honour and

praise of God. It is the foundation of a sterling character; it is the necessity of a Christian life. For what is the Christian life save a life which is lived not unto self, but unto Him which lived and died for us?

And so we pass from the thought of her who exhibited this high self-suppression to the remembrance of how this same quality ought to show itself in us who are called to Christlikeness in our life and ministry. Not self, but Christ; not our honour, but His; not our influence, but His. Yes, this we allow; but do we always allow what follows from this, viz., that our aim should be not to teach souls to depend on us, but on Him? Nay, would not loyalty to this principle lead us to teach them *not* to depend on us, but only to depend on Him? Should we not cultivate in them that independence of us which means dependence on Him? Just as the best teaching is not the doing the task for the child, nor even the showing the child how it is done, but the careful training of the child so that the child can do it for itself, and possess the intelligence and mental courage to face the task alone; so is the highest ideal of ministry the ministry which trains souls to do without us; to face life and duty and temptation alone in the strength of Him who is their Lord and ours. But to realize and to teach this in practice, this ideal of ministry, is hard. Our solicitude concerning souls, which is natural, makes us dread the trusting of souls alone. Our pride is wounded at the thought that they can do without us. But surely our joy should be that they should emerge from childish dependence into that manly estate which is independent; whose faith stands not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. Our rejoicing should be, like the Baptist's, that though we decrease, yet the glory of Christ increases, in that He is ever more and more, though we are less and less, to the souls of men. Like the Virgin, this chiefest should be our joy, that our spirits can rejoice in God, the Saviour of ourselves and others. And this should be the desire of our hearts, that though we are not associated in their lives or duties, they have learned from us that not what *we* say, but what He says, must be their duty; so that without any thoughts of self we may have implanted in them her lesson of quick and ready loyalty to His command: "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."

W. B. RYON.

(To be continued.)

