

MY DUTY TO MY NEIGHBOUR.

(A Paper read before the Oxford Union.)

Hardly any other single precept in the Old Testament is quoted so often in the pen as this one, from the Old Mosaic Law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Later on in the same chapter in which this universal precept is found, the command is enlarged, not only to embrace the home form "Israelite," but also the stranger that sojourneth amongst you: "Thou shalt love him as thyself." This is the precept which our Lord quoted as the second of His two great commandments on which hang all the Law and the Prophets. St. Paul quoted it twice as the sum and substance of human duty, and St. James calls it the Royal Law. In this commandment our Lord emphasised a new principle in ethics. He laid stress upon the Organic Unity of Duty. Goodness in the ancient world, as often as in the modern world, had been thought to consist in obedience to a series of isolated precepts and prohibitions, in observing a number of moral rules, in doing this and not doing that; but the only goodness which Christ cared about, and insisted upon, is that goodness which, when the depths of the heart are proved, will stand the test in His eyes. No Law or performance of Law has any value except as the expression of right feeling. Goodness is a question not of outward acts only, but of inward dispositions and intentions. He reduces all conduct to one single root and motive. He disregards everything except love. It is easy to see how Christ's Doctrine of Love can afford to dispense with rules, because it substitutes a universal principle in their stead. Love is the fulfilment of the Moral Law, because it is a principle, just as much as a passion. Christ declared an ardent, passionate, devoted state of mind to be the root of virtue. If only we can feel toward our neighbour the affection which we feel towards the persons to whom we are most attached, then we shall be lifted above the temptation to injure them. We shall delight to spend ourselves doing them good. When we begin to ask ourselves, like the Lawyer in the Gospel, "Who is my neighbour,"

Christ answers us by His parable of the Samaritan, which contains the whole doctrine of neighbourhood. He tells us, in effect, that our neighbours mean any one, of whatever rank, or race, or religion, who may need our help, in whatever form that may take, if we have the opportunity and ability to succour. In truth, the command reaches further still. "My neighbour," wrote George Macdonald, "is he with whom I have any transaction and human dealings whatever, not the man only with whom I dine, nor the friend with whom I share my thoughts, nor the man whom my compassion would lift from some slough; but the one who makes my clothes, prints my papers and my books, drives me in his cab or car, begs from me in the street, to whom it may be for brotherhood's sake; I may not give, yea, even to the one who condescends to me." No wonder people have treated this precept as a counsel of perfection, which it is impossible for people generally to keep. In a world of competition, some must feel the immense practical difficulty of honestly carrying out such a commandment; for the neighbour, just because he is so near at hand, may become the rival, the critic, the antagonist, the very last person whom it seems natural or even possible to love. When Christ laid down His doctrine of universal Love, which must embrace even our enemies or persecutors, He based it simply upon the Universal Fatherhood of God. Men's conflicting interests all converge as they draw near to their Heavenly Father. When once we can realise the awful amazing fact of God's personal Love, for each and every one, even for the unthankful and the evil, we must learn in all humility to pray, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." Finally, this command implies that each of us has a duty to himself by which he may measure his duty to his neighbour. Thus, for example, our own self-respect may guide us in showing respect to our neighbour. Both in the Old and in the New Testament it tells us, "Thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbour," in the same spirit in which we ought to reprove and rebuke ourselves. It will perhaps be safe to criticise our neighbours not less severely than we criticise ourselves.

The commandment really implies that we are to love them not on the blind self-righteous, self-indulgent fashion in which too often we love ourselves, but love them as loyally, as wisely, as soberly as we ought to love ourselves, not without self-denials; sometimes it may be not without some self-inflicted punishment. In conclusion, this is a subject with a personal application; it calls to each one individually to lay aside all selfishness and negligence, and to put on the whole armour of righteousness, and to "Work the works of Him that sent us while it is day." Who would not like to feel that I have done all in my power to help to bring this dreadful war to an end? We are told it is a spiritual war, which will be decided by spiritual force; that means that every step taken for righteousness by our nation, which must be individually taken, is helping to bring the war to a close. How great are our opportunities and our responsibilities. "The harvest truly is great and the labourers are few." But let us do all in our power. For

"We shall pass this way but once.
Any deed of kindness, any act of love,
Let us not neglect it or defer it,
For we shall not pass this way again."

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TREASURER'S REPORT.

The following payments have been received since last report:—

ORGANISING FUND.

Takapuna, £1; Wellington District, £5 12s; Woodville, £1; Masterton, £1 5s; Opotiki, £1; Wellington Central, £4 14s; Oxford, £2; Hamilton District Convention, per Miss Powell, 10s; total, £17 1s.

Expenditure for same period, £9 1s 2d.

STRENGTH OF THE NATION FUND

New Plymouth, Otahuhu, and Woodville, £1 each.

OTHER RECEIPTS.

Donations to N.Z. Fund: New Plymouth, £2; Wellington Central, £1; Gisborne (Franchise Day collection), £1.

NELLIE BENDELY,

N.Z. Treasurer.

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