

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

From the New York Observer.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

BY REV. HENRY M. GROUT, D. D.

MAY 25.—Liberal Giving.—2 Cor. 6: 1-15.

GOLDEN TEXT.—God loveth a cheerful giver.—2 Cor. 6: 7.

The second Epistle to the Corinthians was written a few months after the first and not long after Paul's departure from Ephesus, where his work had been so greatly blessed. He was now in Macedonia, possibly at Philippi, or as some think, at Thessalonica. He was greatly concerned for the welfare of the Church at Corinth and was now on his way to visit it again. This second letter is sent on before, to prepare the way joyful and fruitful meeting.

The Christians at Jerusalem were just now in great want. Possibly their experiment of a community of goods had impoverished them. It is certain that all Palestine was less prosperous than it had been. Accordingly the leaders at the great conference at Jerusalem (Acts 15) had recommended that the richer churches of the Gentiles should send them aid (Gal. 2: 10). And, in this part of this Epistle, Paul is stirring up the Corinthians to do their share.

Having begun the discussion in the eighth chapter, the Apostle renews it in this. And, though written with specific reference to a case so far away, every part of it will be found suited to our selves. From it we may learn some important lessons respecting right methods and motives in Christian giving.

1. Primarily, though by no means exclusively, such giving should be to needy saints (1).—As touching such ministering, Paul says, "it is superfluous for me to write to you." He had written before (1 Cor. 16: 1). Moreover their own hearts would dictate such remembrance of brethren. Christians, however widely scattered, are one household. They should care for each other as members of a common family.

How does this apply to ourselves? For one thing, each church should be careful to remember its own poor. For another, weak churches should have both the prayers and the aid of those that are strong. Churches on once populous, now deserted, hill sides should not be left to pine and die. "As we have opportunity, let us do good into all men, especially into them who are of the household of faith."

2. Next, giving should be prompt and energetic, that so it may be adequate and sure (2-5)—Paul had been boasting of the Corinthian church, which was in Achaia as both ready and zealous to do its share. And yet there was danger that his boasting would bring shame to him and to them. "The flighty purpose never is o'ertook, unless the deed be on it."

The world is full of good impulses, but how many of these end in sighs and good intentions? Earnest, energetic churches and Christians decide, and straightway act. So Paul says to these Corinthians: "If you mean to have a hand in helping the poor at Jerusalem, give attention to it; be reasonable, energetic; do not wait until the last moment, when you know not what difficulties will start up, have respect to your good name and influence if nothing else; make up beforehand your bounty." A good rule is to be deliberate in planning and swift in execution.

3. Again, giving should be not sparing, but bountiful (6).—It is likened to casting seed into the ground. The wise sower is generous with his seed. As he sows, in kind and measure, so he expects to reap. "Let this," says Paul, "be your rule in giving: be not niggardly; fill your hand and scatter abroad, opening it wide." Such "shall reap also bountifully."

This does not mean that liberal givers shall always reap in kind; though often they do. "There is that withholdeth and it tendeth to poverty." A generous giver may always be poor in worldly goods; and yet be a bountiful reaper of all trust earthly as well as spiritual blessing. He has God's sunshine in his heart; the gratitude of the souls he has blessed; the sweet sense of having done good; and God's care that he shall have at least so much as he needs.

4. Yet again giving should be deliberate and cheerful (7). Here are two points: "Every man according as he purpoeth in his heart"; and "God loveth a cheerful giver." The old law said, give a tenth. The gospel says, let your heart dictate how much it shall be. Calls are numerous, opportunities are many; you may not be able to give much to every cause; therefore deliberate, weigh, decide for yourself; you are free, unconstrained, not under law; have a purpose, and act accordingly!

Are you then at liberty to be mean and niggardly? Nay, you will not be, if Christ is in your heart. Take care that your purpose is Christian; and remember that "God loveth a cheerful giver."

Such are kin with Christ; at heart they are like God himself, who is the greatest of givers. God approves, delights in, loves them. Unwilling gifts, grudgingly bestowed, get no credit in heaven. Out of love, God gave his son for us. It was love which shaped the purpose, and impelled to the gift. It is the same principle in us that the Apostle appeals.

5. Then too, giving should be trustful (8-10). Here we shall do well to follow the New Version, which is clearer and better. And we shall find the thought most remarkable. First, "God is able to make all grace abound unto you; that ye, having all sufficiency in everything may abound unto every good work;" and secondly, "He that supplieth seed to the sower, and bread for food, shall supply and multiply your seed for growing, and increase the fruit of your righteousness." Wonderful language! Did you ever before catch its force? It is said that it was the reading of these verses which decided Frank to build the Orphan House at Halle.

Give and you shall have the means of giving! Devote your life to loving service to God and his earthly children, to doing good, and God will take care of you. You shall not come to utter want; nay, he will see that you have wherewith to "abound unto every good work."

The giver commonly finds this promise wonderfully fulfilled. Doubtless his desire to give impels him to industry, economy, forethought, exactness and integrity. He trains his children to a right use of money. They are not improvident. There are men never rich, who have been great givers of money, as well as of time and strength. It is safe to "trust in the Lord and do good."

6. Once more, giving should be with an eye to the great blessings sure to come of it (11-14). Paul reminded the Corinthians of this: "For the administration of this service supplieth the want of the saints." What would needy ones do without the gifts of the more prosperous? What joy and comfort and means of usefulness ours may carry to homes of want!

But these gifts for the poor saints at Jerusalem were solicited for another reason: namely, to cement Christian confidence and affection. The Jewish Christians now so numerous and influential. To send them needed aid would be a good proof that the Gentiles were truly in "subject to the gospel of Christ." And so there would be more "abundant thanksgivings to God;" the Jewish Christians would pray for their Gentile brethren, and "long after" them because of the "exceeding grace of God" so demonstrated.

One reason for our giving should be just this: to keep our hearts open, and the hearts of others open towards us; and especially to lead men to "glorify God." When the worlds full of loving, thanksgivings to God the work of the earthly church will be all done.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

1. God means that all his children shall be givers. Giving is for ourselves a great means of grace, and of piety.

2. It is very true that charity should begin at home. This is the divine order. But if it ends there it is not true charity or love, but selfishness.

3. Rich men in wealthy churches should not forget the struggling churches where so many of them learned of Christ, and where many of Christians are started in the new life.

4. Let us not overlook the exhortation to "make up beforehand our bounty for giving; to save, to lay by, to keep in readiness, the means of so doing. We shall thus waste less on trifles, find giving less burdensome and make our gifts more abundant and sure.

5. We should not make too much of the idea that giving tends to present earthly prosperity. No doubt it does; but many great givers never become rich. We must not look upon our gifts as a kind of pious speculation. It is enough that a poor man, with the self-forgetting spirit of Christ in his heart, is a hundred-fold happier in the scantiest home than if, by hoarding, he had gained a world.

6. God's "unspeakable gift" to men is that of his Son, our Saviour. We are to give bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked, fuel to the cold; but the true disciple will give with most of self-denial and earnestness the things of Christ. To carry Him to hearts and homes, near and afar, is the divinest giving.

A CALIFORNIAN planted a eucalyptus tree in his yard ten years ago. For seven years he noticed no improvement nor growth. At the end of that time, however, the tree shot up rapidly. Recently while cleaning his well; he found the bottom matted with eucalyptus roots, which had forced their way through the brick wall of the well so as to get at the water. The well was fifty five feet distance from the spot where the tree stood above ground.

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