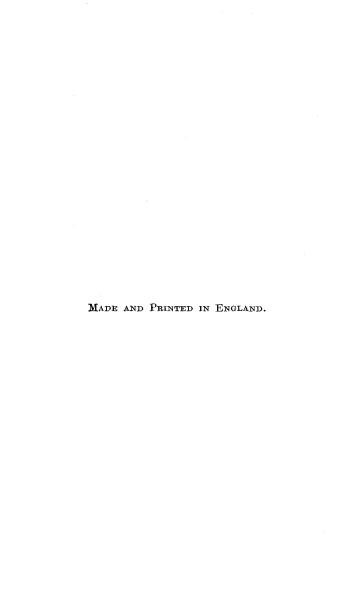
## "AN ODOUR OF A SWEET SMELL."

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## "An Odour of a Sweet Smell."

In considering the subject of the collection, it may be well first to state that the custom of affording an opportunity to brethren to give immediately after the Lord's supper must not be taken to imply that the collection forms part of the supper itself. The act of giving has a close moral link with the supper in the way of a response, but it is in no way part of the supper itself. In instituting the supper the Lord gave it to His own, and this feature of His giving to us is still present in the Lord's supper. He gives it to us, "Take, eat," He said. On the other hand, in the collection the saints give to the Lord. Hence we should not look for any reference to the saints giving to a collection in connection with instituting the supper, because it is not part of it. This is a very simple reason why reference to it is not found in those passages; it would be surprising if it were.

This should clear the difficulty some have raised on this point. But it may be asked, Why introduce a collection at such a time? is it not out of place? Good indeed that saints

should have the opportunity of expressing their love, but why give the opportunity at that particular moment? To answer this difficulty it will be well to consider first the true character of the supper itself.

A confusion of thought often exists through not distinguishing between saints viewed as the assembly of God on earth, which is composed of those who have been baptised by one Spirit into one body, and those same persons viewed as risen with Christ, or as the brethren of John xx.

As the assembly of God on earth, saints are set together in various local assemblies, and are considered as in the actual circumstances and conditions of life here—men and women, households, bond and free, etc.; and as in those conditions they have been baptised by one Spirit into one body, and the order governing the assembly here takes these circumstances into consideration, women are to keep silence in the assemblies. (See 1 Cor. vii. 20; xi. 2–16; xiv. 34.) As risen with Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female; saints so considered are a spiritual formation "in Christ Jesus."

These two views of the assembly are obviously distinct. In the former view they come together in a certain place on earth—at Corinth or elsewhere, but in the latter view they are, whilst actually here, considered as dead and

risen with Christ, and thus in a region of spiritual life. One is the outward view, the other the inward or spiritual view of the assembly.

Now obviously eating and drinking are material matters, the actions of persons in the present human conditions of life, men and women here. Hence it is in the Epistle to the Corinthians, which thus views the saints, that we find reference to the Lord's supper; and it is added, "as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup," again, "he that eateth." The Lord's supper has a spiritual side to it which is a remembrance—a memorial. But even with regard to the remembrance, the material side is brought before us in Corinthians. What the Lord Jesus actually did in taking the bread, giving thanks for it, breaking it, and taking the cup in like manner, the assembly now is to do in remembrance of Him. It is not something we do in our spirits, but a material act, significant, of course, of what is spiritual in the way of a memorial.

I have dwelt at some length on this point, as it would appear that some view the matter of "this do" (in 1 Cor. xi.) and eating and drinking (in Matthew and Mark) as relating to our spirits; whereas they are in themselves material, or physical acts; indeed, they are actions which could be done without being accompanied with any spiritual element. This,

of course, would be wrong, and would bring down judgment on the one who so acted, but it shews the act itself is not one we do with our spirits. There is, as already stated, a spiritual or inward side to this act, if rightly done, which is a remembrance of the Lord, but this does not change the nature of the act itself, which is a material one and public in character, that is, it was an act which could be seen by mere outward observation.

Before proceeding to shew the ground upon which a collection may be made after, or in connection with the Lord's supper, it may be remarked that the foregoing shews that there would be nothing incongruous or out of keeping in doing so; for in the first place the saints, as taking the supper are viewed, though as baptised by one Spirit into one body, in their actual flesh and blood conditions of women and men (and not as risen with Christ, or of a spiritual order), and, secondly, the supper in itself is a material and public act (which should, of course, be accompanied by the spiritual remembrance) and the ordinance involves actually eating and drinking. Remarks, therefore, as to what is seen being introduced when what is unseen engages us, do not apply; for the supper itself has a seen or material side to it.

Now let us look at the collection, as it is called. What is the real character of this? It

is obviously a material matter, but is it only this? The saints in giving, too, will give of what is called their "carnal things"; but is their act only a carnal one? What, let me repeat, is the real character of a gift to the Lord? It is material; but so is the supper. Is it only so? What do we read in Philippians iv.? Such a gift is described as an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.

The collection which affords the opportunity for a gift such as this has a material side of course; but the value of each coin is different, as given by those who give to God, from its value in the commercial or financial world. Two mites of a widow who cast in all her living are worth more than the gifts of many rich. Is this a carnal value, as has been said? Is it a carnal gift? Has it no spiritual element in it? If the bread and the cup, which are material, speak to a heart who rightly partakes of them of the body and blood of the Lord, cannot a gift which is material have a spiritual value, and be in the appreciation of the Lord as an odour of a sweet smell, etc.? Most surely it can. As the material eating and drinking, if rightly done, is accompanied by a spiritual discernment of the body and blood of the Lord, so a monetary gift, if rightly given, is an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to the Lord. In the Lord's supper the Lord gives to us; in a gift such as that of which we have spoken, we give to Him.

It now remains for us to inquire when

would be the most suitable time for such a collective action to take place—a collective action, I repeat, for 1 Corinthians xvi. refers to the action of each one at home, not a collective action; and though the individual laying by in store, was to be done each first day of the week, and was thus to be governed by that which spoke of the spiritual privileges of and what was proper to the assembly, yet obviously each one laying by in store at home obviously each one laying by in store at home is not in itself a collective or an assembly action, even if it were done by each individual comprising the assembly, but an individual one.

The convened character of the assembly does not seem to be considered in 1 Corinthians

xv. and xvi., but rather the light of resurrection in which we walk, and privileges of service to govern those who are viewed as gathered in chapters xi.-xiv. We are not told in 1 Corinthians xvi. how the gathering into one of what had been put by at home took place, nor does the passage in 2 Corinthians viii. and ix. state this. The latter passage however does say that the bounty was to be in readiness when the apostle came, therefore the individual store had to be brought together. We are also told that the assemblies in Macedonia were marked by this grace, and Philippians iv. states that

the gift the apostle received came from the assembly.

We are therefore left to spiritual discernment in this matter. When, then, could the assembly give? that is, when could saints give together as one and in their collective character? It must be at a time when the assembly is "come together," that is, when it is convened, as we speak. And at such a time, let us note, fellowship (which abidingly exists) finds an expression in a very definite way. What time could more fittingly be chosen than when brethren come together in assembly to partake of the supper, when, indeed, the expression of the Lord's love and God's free givingness are definitely before the heart?

As we have seen, the Lord's supper relates to the public side of the assembly, and saints partake of it as in wilderness conditions. It is essentially an act which expresses fellowship. It is to us as the voice of our Beloved. Though the bread remains bread, and the wine, wine, to us they speak of the body and blood of the Lord, and are thus an expression of His love to us.

Let us notice these definite features of the Lord's supper:

- (1) It is a public act and material in character, but has also an inward and spiritual side—a remembrance.
  - (2) It is an act expressive of fellowship, the

assembly being come together, and partaking in that character.

(3) It expresses the Lord's giving and His love to the assembly, as also the free givingness of God.

Now these features have a parallel in the collection:

- (1) It too is a public act, and material in character (the saints giving of their substance), having also an inward or a spiritual side, for it is an odour of a sweet smell, etc.
- (2) And like the Lord's supper, the collection also is an act expressive of fellowship, the assembly being come together, and giving in that character.
- (3) It expresses the love of the assembly to the Lord, and their liberality in response to His love to it.

It would be difficult to find any one thing which is done by saints collectively which more resembles the supper in these three qualities. It is obviously no part of the supper, but is a very happy and suited expression of response to the Lord's love as expressed therein. It is done in fellowship and has a moral beauty about it, being fragrant with the savour of the death of Christ, for the same words are used by the Holy Spirit to describe it as He employs to speak of Christ's offering Himself. (Compare Phil. iv. and Eph. v.)

If we think of what we actually give, what

is our gift of carnal things (for such in actuality they are, as the bread and the cup are actually material things) compared with the spiritual things which we have received? Would any one of us deliberately give up the definite knowledge and enjoyment of even one spiritual blessing for all earthly substance? No, indeed! There is no comparison between the actual gift and our spiritual things, but in the saints giving of those things—note, the giving them there is something very difference from what is carnal; and the real value is in the giving and motives therein, and the actual gift becomes graced thereby. The actions are the fruit of the Spirit of Christ, and hence the gift, not only the giving, is graced and is spoken of as an odour of a sweet smell. What could be more appropriate or what time more suitable?

It may be inquired, Why not have the collection as we come together, that is, as we enter? The custom of gifts in the temple is supposed to have been this. But this would be inappropriate, for as entering we are not yet assembled. Two words are used by Jacob in connection with assembling, "Gather yourselves," "Assemble yourselves." (Gen. xlix. 1.) In our coming together the first expression applies; being found together we assemble ourselves, we are exercised to move and act as one; our individuality is merged. We all

partake of that one loaf being one body, one loaf, not as so many individuals. (1 Cor. x.) Then, too, is not the act of giving one of response? Is not the order that first God gives to us, and then we to Him? Do we not love because He first loved? Hence, as we have seen, the Lord's supper speaks of His giving, His love to us; this is and must be first. Then we may give, this is one of the expressions of our love to Him. His death in all its preciousness is the basis and gives its fragrance to our giving, and our gift thereby becomes an odour of a sweet smell.

But, if not as we come together, it may be asked, Could it not take place at the conclusion of the meeting? In reply to this it may be said that giving after this kind is not the highest exercise of the assembly. It relates to time conditions, and though the giving is not merely with a view to paying our meeting-room rent and the expense of cleaning (for the giving is to the Lord and the interests of Christ in all their wide extent and variety are before the heart), yet every responsibility would be faced, and faced together in fellowship and in an act of love.

If the Lord grant the favour as in assembly in the power of His love, we may in our souls enter the region of resurrection spiritually. In the sense of His company He may lead us to enjoy blessings which are known in association with Him—spiritual and heavenly bles-

sings. The privilege of caring for His interests on earth in the place of His rejection is soon actually to cease, for we shall soon actually enter our eternal home. In a certain sense we may have an anticipation of this in the enjoyment of assembly privileges. In one view of the assembly we are in the place of His rejection, come together in the sense of His absence to shew forth His death until He come In such conditions we may happily care for His interests, and according to our ability give, and give in unity; but as thus together the Lord Jesus may make Himself known to us, and He may conduct us to enjoy His own sphere, where He is known as supreme and where we share with Him. In itself this region is beyond all question of need or service; it is where we taste the earnest of what will be our eternal portion. It would surely be out of keeping to return at such a time and think of service and of caring for the Lord's interests. In our last act in relation to time we may do so in response to His love. What we may now touch is "in character" when time ceases to be. As to fact we do return. Spiritual sensibilities as under Christ's influence, as well as a due regard to our brethren's exercises, can alone determine the moment when to linger would but mean weakness. Our spiritual power has measure; the Lord give us grace and sobriety to recognise it.

One more point. It may be inquired, as a

collection relates to the time conditions of the assembly, why it is that there is no definite instruction as to this in the epistle relative to order in the assembly—that to the Corinthians.

This is a point of interest. We have seen, however, that to have a collection at such a time would in no way be unsuitable; indeed, no time and no circumstances could more befit the act, but why is there no definite instruction as to this, when there is such explicit direction to the individual as to putting by at home? (Let us note however in passing that even as to the individual it is direction, uniform custom, rather than command.) In the first place we should scarcely expect a command. Would not a command be unsuitable in this connection? Does not the apostle in 2 Corinthians viii., when seeking that the assembly there should be marked by this grace definitely say, "I speak not by commandment." Then as we have seen it is no part of the supper itself, so instructions would not be given in that connection, as it is really not the subject in hand. We are, however, exhorted to be marked by this grace, and instances are given of assemblies that were so marked.

It is an act of love in response to the Lord's love. Hence, as it is an act of love, it is left to the sensibilities of love to select the moment most suitable and appropriate to express this assembly grace in an assembly manner.

Devotedness is seen not only in the carrying out of commands, but in actions of love which go beyond what is commanded and are done in a comely manner. The true character of Christianity consists in the fact that the Holy Spirit indwells the assembly, and is the source in believers of spiritual sensibilities, love and intelligence. It is not a legal system consisting only in carrying out commands. Is there to be no action without a command? Does not the apostle say in 2 Corinthians viii., when treating of this very subject, "I speak not by commandment . . . but to prove the sincerity of your love." There was no divine command to appoint deacons, and after the apostles had judged that this was the right course, then they did not choose the men full of faith and of the Holy Spirit to take charge of this matter (as we may read in Acts vi.); it was left to the assembly to do so. The saints had the necessary discernment, and acted rightly, as the sequel shews. The Holy Spirit was there. He no longer here?

There was no command to the believers to act as they did in Acts xi. and send a gift to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Yet how the grace of Christ was seen in their act! Spiritual sensibilities expressed themselves in this way. Who said that they were to do it in the way they did? Love acted in love's way, and it was a spiritual way. In Christianity everything

is centralised in the Holy Spirit who dwells in the assembly.

A spiritual man would always recognise the Lord's commands, but the actions of love are more than obedience; they go beyond what is commanded, and the love that prompts the act selects the manner and time of its performance. It was so in the case of Philemon. The apostle says that he might have enjoined Philemon to act in the way suggested; but he places the matter on a higher level than that of obedience to a command, and leaves Philemon free, assured that he would do even more than he said, knowing well his obedience. (Ver. 21.) In an especial way this is so in assembly actions. The commands of the Lord leave no room for question-every spiritual man would recognise They do leave room, however, for love to go beyond, and act spiritually. Holy Spirit indwelling the assembly imparts sensibilities which shew themselves in actions of love which are carried out in wisdom.

The Lord give us keen and holy sensibilities, as well as intelligence, so that in the first place we may more rightly appreciate the true character of the Lord's supper, and then recognise the privilege of bringing to the Lord that which is in His esteem as an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.

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