

Godliness

F. B. Hole.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 16, 1924, page 58.)

When the Apostle Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, there were very ominous signs appearing in the church of God, and his mind was seriously disturbed as he contemplated them. A lot of foolish ideas were gaining currency; there was much unprofitable talk, and men were turning aside into all kinds of side issues. Leaving the main line of God's truth, they were getting into little sidings of their own that lead nowhere, and to nothing but endless questions and disputes.

In the first place there were the would-be law teachers at work. All who fell under their influence were diverted to "fables and endless genealogies." 1 Timothy 1 and 1 Timothy 4 allude to this particular evil. In it we see an outbreak of "the leaven of the Pharisees" of which the Lord warned His disciples. Today it is perpetuated in the semi-Jewish and ritualistic line of things, which in its full-blown Romish form is simply full of grotesque fables and of the endless genealogies necessary to build up their "apostolic succession" theories.

In the second place there were "men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth." They were teaching otherwise than the apostle, as 1 Timothy 6: 3-10 shows. They, too, had their questions and strifes of words based upon the idea that "gain is godliness," i.e., that gain is the end or object of godliness. Those who fell under their influence would be set upon riches and consequently fall into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. Here, then, was an outbreak of "the leaven of Herod": a deliberate attempt to make Christianity a matter of worldly profit. Today the leaven of Herod works energetically. Many there be who, though quite ready to denounce the suggestion that *personal* or *private* gain is the end of godliness, would enthusiastically applaud the idea that *SOCIAL* gain is the end of godliness. "Other-worldliness" they detest. "This-worldliness" they delight in. To them, a more comfortable and easier world, based upon better social conditions with universal peace is the whole substance of religion.

In the third place there were some turning aside to "the oppositions of science falsely so-called," as mentioned in the two closing verses of the epistle.

"Profane and vain babblings" were the product of this departure also. This third form of evil does not appear to have at that time assumed such dimensions at Ephesus as the other two, and hence there is only a brief allusion to it. Still it was there; and in it we discern an outbreak of "the leaven of the Sadducees," the assumption that man's mind, man's reasoning faculties are the ultimate court of appeal in every question.

When men thus practically deify that "science" which is the product of their own observations and reasonings, they quickly become the sport of the devil with his much higher order of intelligence and vaster stores of knowledge accumulated over thousands of years. Consequently their boasted science becomes "science, falsely so-called." This evil has today grown to gigantic proportions. We hope that every one of our readers, the young Christians amongst them especially, will diligently mark all that is implied in this one and only mention of "science" in the New Testament.

In the presence of these dangers the apostle was led to write to Timothy of the church as "the house of God . . . the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3: 16). He points out what should characterise the house of God, if it is to be worthy of the God who indwells it by His Spirit.

Grace is the portal, the door of entrance into it, as seen in 1 Timothy 1. On entering, it is found to be "an house of prayer for all nations," as the opening verses of 1 Timothy 2. indicate. It bears an evangelical character, and both the men and the women composing it are to comport themselves with godliness. Especial care is to be taken that all who hold office in it are marked by a character that is a reflection of God Himself, as we see in 1 Timothy 3. In that house speaks the Spirit, who indwells it, as 1 Timothy 4 shows. In the apostles' day He spoke by way of revelation and inspiration as unfolded in 1 Corinthians 2. Now that the apostles are gone and the canon of Scripture is closed, He still speaks through the inspired communications He originally gave, and all we need is to have ears to hear. In the rest of 1 Timothy 4, together with 1 Timothy 5 and 1 Timothy 6 we have the Spirit's warnings and instructions in detail. His voice orders the house of God, that all its furniture, so to speak, may be worthy of God, whose house it is.

Now all through one word is very prominent — GODLINESS. In one *word*, *this* is what should mark those who are of God's house, and *this is* what serves as an antidote to the evils which are pointed out.

Godliness, or piety, is the fruit of living and moving with God before the soul. It brings God into everything, so that everything is regulated in relation to God, and hence God-likeness is stamped upon those who are godly. To live a life of self-consciousness is to be *selfish*. The world-conscious man is bound to be *worldly*. The one who is dominated by God-consciousness, so that the thought of God and of His will enters into every question, and everything is viewed in relation to Him, is *godly*. The man of selfishness and of worldliness fits neatly enough into the world system. Godliness alone befits the house of God. All else is a misfit there, Godliness is greatly at a discount to-day, a discount which seems to increase with every year that passes. In our school days it was hardly possible to fling a greater insult at a boy's head than to call him "pious." Since then the false-named "science" which aims at eliminating all idea of God, accounting for everything by "nature" plus human agencies, has increased by leaps and bounds. As far as man's vain thinkings and talkings are concerned, God is politely bowed out of His own universe, the sphere of religion included. Instead of God being brought into everything, which is the way of godliness, He is excluded from everything, and hence ungodliness or impiety has increased by leaps and bounds also.

The younger generation of Christians are perhaps hardly aware of the pace at which things have been moving, as they have not the length of outlook which enables them to judge of it. It would be safe to affirm, we believe, that not for 200 years has the public profession of Christianity in Britain been marked by such impiety. The ground that was gained through the series of gracious revivals that commenced with Wesley and Whitfield has been all lost, and perhaps more than lost, during the past thirty or forty years, until a pagan or semi-pagan frame of mind has been produced in the masses of the people.

In the presence of this the promotion of godliness amongst the followers of the Lord has become a prime necessity. Nothing would have a profounder effect than a revival of downright old-fashioned scriptural godliness. Those who are of God's household would then stand out, wearing the livery that becomes them, clear and distinct in the midst of an ungodly world. It would involve increased persecution for them (see 2 Tim. 3: 12), but the testimony of the Lord would be greatly honoured.

Now godliness rests upon a certain basis, hence the apostle writes of "the mystery" or "the secret" of godliness. Piety is a beautiful flower which has its roots hidden beneath the soil, and those roots are its "mystery." "Without controversy [or 'confessedly'] great is the mystery of godliness" — and there follows that remarkable passage which summarises in a few crisp sentences the great facts connected

with the manifestation of God in Christ. The passage begins with God manifested in the flesh and ends with His being received up into glory as Man. Here are found the secret roots of all true godliness. There is no godliness but that which springs from faith in God so revealed.

A certain class of person is fond of pointing out some professed unbeliever, who is yet a straightforward clean-living man of the world, such as are occasionally to be found, and proclaiming him to be more godly than the average believer. The fact is, he is not *godly* at all! Naturally amiable, generous, straightforward, of correct behaviour he may be, but that is all. The knowledge of God, as He has revealed Himself in Christ, is the only possible source of godliness. It is its producing cause, and the more the believer grows in the knowledge of God the more will godliness mark him.

If 1 Timothy 3: 16 gives us the roots of godliness the whole epistle in its many instructions shows us its many-hued flowers. The praying men lifting up holy hands, the women in modest deportment and apparel, as indicated in 1 Timothy 2; the bishops and deacons in 1 Timothy 3, with their sobriety, vigilance and self restraint; the men who labour and trust in the living God becoming an example to the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity, as in 1 Timothy 4; the "widows indeed" of 1 Timothy 5; the servants and masters, the rich men who trust not in uncertain riches but in the living God, and hence who are rich in good works and ready to distribute, as in 1 Timothy 6 — all these set before us godliness in its beautiful features as it is worked out in practice.

What do we know of these things? Does the uprising generation of young believers promise to blossom forth into men of holiness and prayer, and women of discretion and modest dress? Are the older believers setting an example in this direction? We ask these questions with anxiety and concern.

In 1 Tim. 4: 7-10 Paul sounds out the praises of godliness. It has promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come, and hence is profitable to all things. This is declared to be a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, as much as is the saying that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." The godly man trusts in the living God as verse 10 indicates, and thereby brings Him into everything, even the smallest details of his life.

Now this is a thing in which we are to exercise ourselves. Bodily exercise profits for a little while, the spiritual exercise which results in godliness abides in its healthful effects for eternity. The young people who wish to be in first-rate physical trim willingly submit to a whole round of exercises. They rise early and get to work with their exerciser. The apostle urges us to be at least as much in earnest in our spiritual exercises as they are in their physical. Let us EXERCISE ourselves *unto godliness*.

Does anyone ask how this may be done? Read the rest of 1 Timothy 4! Having exhorted Timothy to godliness the apostle indicates how it may be promoted. "Give attendance," he says, "to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." Till Paul came Timothy was to give himself to the public reading of the inspired writings with the exhortation and teaching which would flow from this. But then how should he publicly read and discourse upon what he had not first privately read and studied for himself? The greater includes the less. Many of us may not be called to the public reading of God's Word, but we all are to the private reading of it, and this is a prime method of promoting godliness.

Meditation is mentioned in verse 15. We must assimilate what we read. We are not nourished by what we *eat*, but by what we *digest*. When we so meditate as to give ourselves wholly to the things of God, then our profiting begins to appear to all. We grow in the ways of godliness. Thus it is we take heed to ourselves, and save from ungodliness not only ourselves, but others.

Oh! for a revival of godliness. May God Himself raise up Christian young men and women by the thousand, who in this godless, because God-excluding, age, are not ashamed to be peculiar and bring

God into all the details of life here, not ashamed to walk in His fear and own Him by a simple trust, happy to walk in the light of what He is, as revealed in Christ. To this end may He be pleased to revive amongst us all, the young especially, a thirst for His Word, which may result in a far keener interest in the Scriptures and their systematic and prayerful study, and which may lead us to EXERCISE OURSELVES in order to get time for this reading and meditation. Lastly may He be pleased to use these few remarks, and the pages of this magazine generally, to promote all this, to His glory!