

## THE FAITHFUL.

By the Rev. E. HIRST, M.A.

THE New Testament has several names for Christ's followers. St. Paul's epistles speak of them as "The Saints," the holy, or the consecrated people,<sup>1</sup> meaning those hallowed and believing brethren who are united with the Lord. Because of the Holy Spirit's indwelling, they were being sanctified, for that is his special task. "The Saints" is thus a fitting name. Another name is "The Brethren," which is to be found in both the Johannine and the Pauline Epistles.<sup>2</sup> Brother is not used in the New Testament in exclusive reference to family connections. It indicates membership or brotherhood in the same religious community. The Acts of the Apostles speaks of believers as the people of "The Way." It seems that at an early date, "The Way" was a name given to the Christian Faith.<sup>3</sup> This seems to have followed quite logically from Christ's teaching. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by Me."<sup>4</sup> As Christ had spoken of Himself as "the way," it was natural that His people should be known as those of "The Way." It was in Antioch that they were first named Christians.<sup>5</sup> This may have been a nickname invented by the Antiochenes to distinguish Christ's followers from the Jews. This name is the one which has remained in general use, and perhaps it is the most appropriate of them all. There are also other names. "The called," *οἱ κλητοὶ*<sup>6</sup> is one of these, meaning those who have been summoned into the Messianic Kingdom. "The Elect," *οἱ ἐκλεκτοὶ*<sup>7</sup> is another, implying those chosen out by God who have been placed in the Holy Spirit's sanctifying power. There is another name which seems to have come into use at a very early date, "The Faithful," *οἱ πιστοὶ*<sup>8</sup> This name sums up a great deal. It not only means the followers of the Lord, but also incorporates in its own name, that which designated "The Faith" itself. It is this last name which we wish to study in a measure of detail, noting its meaning and considering its implications in the connection between creed and conduct. Such a study has a bearing upon the Book of Common Prayer, for The Catechism uses the name in stating that the Body and the Blood of Christ are "verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper." Article XIX says that "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered, according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same." "The Faithful" means those who enjoy membership in a visible body—the

<sup>1</sup> I Cor. i. 2; Col. i. 2; Phil. i. 1, etc.<sup>2</sup> I John iii. 14; I Thess. i. 4, etc.<sup>3</sup> Acts ix. 2; xix. 23, etc.<sup>4</sup> St. John xiv. 6.<sup>5</sup> Acts xi. 26.<sup>6</sup> Jude verse 1.<sup>7</sup> I Pet. i. 1.<sup>8</sup> Rev. xvii. 14.

Church. It may also have a meaning of deeper spiritual significance. Those who were numbered among "The Faithful" in the early Church did not always find it a comfortable or an easy membership. Treachery, suspicion and persecution ever dogged their footsteps, for it might mean either suffering or death. Persecution certainly would tend to sift the false from the true. We know that numbers actually apostatized. However, many stood firm, testifying to the fact of their faithfulness both to Him whose faith they professed and "The Faithful" amongst whom they were numbered. This union with the Lord and each other was a marked feature of primitive Christianity. The first great lesson which St. Paul was called upon to learn was that of the unity of the Christian with Christ. He emphasized this lesson in later years, for he wrote to the Corinthians, "He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit."<sup>1</sup> The question asked of him at the Damascus gate was not "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou my followers?" but "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"<sup>2</sup> There is a vital connection which links the lowliest follower of Christ to his Lord. This spiritual union cannot be over-emphasized. Under persecution, this was always prominent, but under Constantine and his successors, when it became the accepted thing that one should be a Christian, and the outward organization of the Church came to be particularly stressed, membership in the Church tended to eclipse that essential verity of the Christian's spiritual union with the Master. The underlying spiritual principle of personal union persisted, it is true, for St. Augustine and others did not lose sight of it, but the strain to emphasize the importance of membership in the visible organization tended to relegate the former principle to a position of secondary importance. The Church of Christ, the visible body of "The Faithful," seemed to be conceived of in terms of an organization rather than a living organism. The necessity of the outward expression almost obscured the necessity of spiritual vitality derived from Christ Himself. Under Papal rule, right up to the Reformation, the ecclesiastical organization under Papal headship was demanded as the first necessity for membership in the Church. Cardinal Bellarmine, the protagonist of the Papacy at the end of the sixteenth century obviously held views which were almost entirely outward and visible. He wrote as follows: "We deny that to constitute a man a member of the true Church any internal virtue is requisite."<sup>3</sup> To be numbered amongst "The Faithful" it was held that membership in the outward organization was the first requisite. This is but a repetition of exclusive Judaism and intolerant Mohammedanism. The followers of Mohammed are known amongst their brethren as "The Faithful," but it seems that with them merit is found in outward ritual observance rather than in an inward and spiritual life. It is this fact which renders Islam quite a comfortable creed almost divorced from moral life. The conception of the faithful man in the New Testament and the Book of Common Prayer is far removed from such an idea as that which has just been outlined. Whilst no one would wish to minimize the necessity of the outward organization, remembering

<sup>1</sup> I Cor. vi. 17.<sup>2</sup> Acts ix. 4.<sup>3</sup> *De Eccl. Mil.*, ii.

that membership in the body of Christ is important from the prominence given to Baptism throughout the New Testament, and which line the Prayer Book seeks to follow, it must not be forgotten that the spiritual connection between the Christian and the Christ must be there first. It is Christ who places the believer in the Church and not *vice versa*. "The Faithful," then, are those who are joined to the Lord, and, at the same time, are striving to hold the Faith in its fulness and live by its standards. The two must go together. Spiritual union with Christ comes first, and membership in the outward body will follow as a consequence. When St. Peter saw that grace was given to Cornelius and his household, he at once recognized that the outward and visible sign should be set upon them in Holy Baptism, for "he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> Faithful Christians are those in whose lives Christ's ways are manifest; mere membership in the communion cannot be enough to merit the holding of His Name. It was the "good and faithful" servant in the parable who was bidden to enter into the joy of his Lord.<sup>2</sup> The Papyri has the same meaning, as is shown by a letter of the third century written by a Christian presbyter named Penosiris regarding a Christian woman who had been banished during the Decian persecution. It says, "I have handed her over to good and true (or faithful) men . . . until her son Nilus arrives." "The Faithful" cannot be those who simply give an intellectual assent to a set of propositions or to a scheme of life. The faith they profess must be the life itself in its entirety. There seem to be three elements in Faith as the New Testament sees it, and which must be found in "The Faithful" to whom the Prayer Book refers. First, the mind comes into operation, for as conviction of Christ and of God gradually gains the ascendant in the mind, intellectual assent is given to the content of the Christian Creed. The next step is the venture of trust in reliance upon that Faith as a plan of salvation and sanctification. Faith is often described as belief and trust. Both of these have a part, but they are of the inward part of faith. The Christian Faith, however, must be worked out in a social atmosphere, and thus its outward expression must come into its own. This is acknowledged in the consent of the will which puts the inward principles into active operation in the open life lived before the world's unrestricted gaze. Life cannot be lived successfully in separate sections, for it is a complete whole. St. Paul recognized this to the full in the matter of the Holy Communion. "Whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgement unto himself, if he discern not the body."<sup>3</sup> The apostle makes it plain that he who partakes unworthily partakes not of the blessing, but partakes of "judgement unto himself." The distinctive features of the Christian Faith they profess by membership in the Body of Christ must be manifest in the minds and manners, and in the souls of Christ's faithful ones.

<sup>1</sup> Acts x. 48.<sup>2</sup> S. Matt. xxv. 21-23.<sup>3</sup> I Cor. xi. 27-29.

This is not to ignore the fact that those who are numbered amongst "The Faithful," may fall, fail and falter. The truest Christian is the one who is most conscious of his own shortcomings. The sentiments of the hymn are still true :

" And they, who fain would serve thee best,  
Are conscious most of wrong within."<sup>1</sup>

Whilst realizing this, the Christian knows that one of the distinctive features of The Faith is the fact that if a man should fall, he can rise again in the power of his Lord, a forgiven and a restored man. Knowing this, he will not seek to presume upon God's mercy, but will constantly endeavour to bring his life into true alignment with the standard of the Saviour. It is a heartening thought to know that we are not looked upon by the Father merely as we are, but as those "accepted in the Beloved,"<sup>2</sup> and as what we can be when Christ has completed His work in the hearts of His faithful ones.

THE GREAT GALILEAN RETURNS. By Henry Kendall Booth. Pp. xvi + 218. *Charles Scribner's Sons.* 6s. net.

The main purpose of Dr. Booth's excellent book is to recall Christians to a reconsideration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with all its implications in our social order. His plea is that the real message and teaching of our Lord had, through the centuries, been allowed to become obscure, until the Gospel preached bore little resemblance to the transforming word of Jesus of Nazareth and had lost its dynamic. Carefully and convincingly he takes the reader back to the message as originally proclaimed—"a Gospel for the shepherdless flock of all ages." He points to the centre of the message—"The Kingdom of God"—an ideal, a passion and a faith ; something that involved the transforming of the social life in which men moved. Through the centuries he traces the eclipse of this leading and foundation idea, showing how it became eclipsed by a Christianity centred in Sacraments and dogmatism, prosperity and nationalism, completely at variance with the Gospel of Galilee. Happily he is able to show how, during the twentieth century, the lost Gospel of the Kingdom has been gradually rediscovered, as the result of pioneers in various lands. He ends with a practical programme for the Christian Church and a call to a definite crusade for justice, peace and goodwill, outstanding characteristics of the Kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus.

Dr. Booth, by this book, takes a worthy place among those who, by their pen, are witnessing to the plain duty of the Church of Christ to labour more intelligently and with greater zeal for the coming on earth of the Kingdom of God.

<sup>1</sup> H. Twells. "At even ere the sun was set."

<sup>2</sup> Eph. i. 6.