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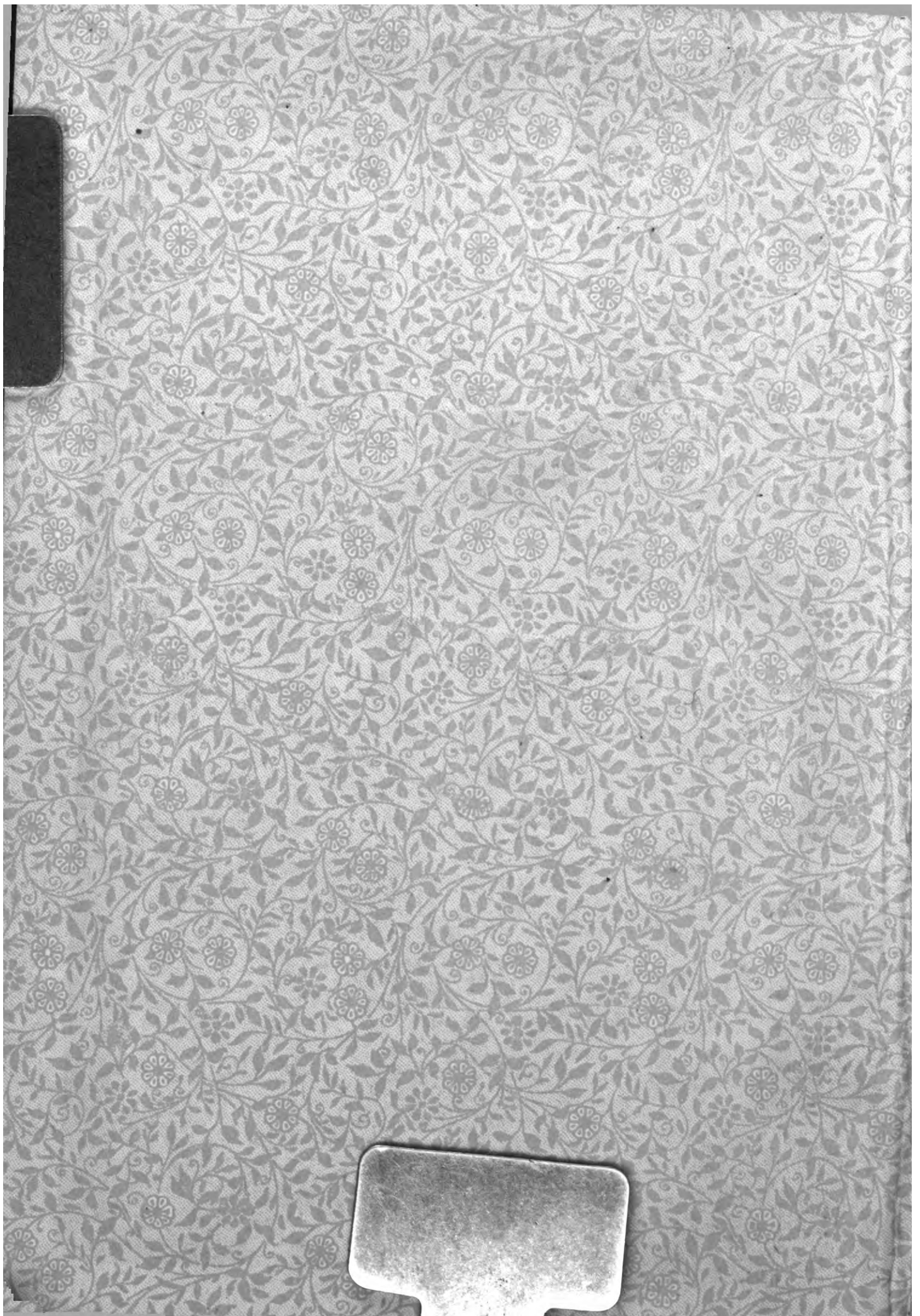
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**Gleanings  
from a  
ministry of fifty  
years**

**Charles Holland**







# Gleanings from a Ministry of Fifty Years.

BY

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'Have not I written that I might make thee know the certainty  
of the words of truth?'



## INTRODUCTION.

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MY object in publishing the following addresses is, chiefly, that I may leave behind me some permanent record of the truths I have been permitted to preach and teach to a flock to which I have ministered more than thirty years.

They contain the substance of my sermons (though not the identical ones) which I have delivered from notes during that period, and during the preceding twenty years of my ministry in other places.

It would almost seem unnecessary to publish thoughts on subjects which have been so much better treated by innumerable writers before me. But I am inclined to think that a confirmation in writing of what people have heard from the



pulpit has a special interest, and produces a permanent effect, which would not result from other persons' writings, though they may be superior in every respect.

By a perusal of these simple essays, I hope the memory of many will be refreshed. The voice so often reiterating these warnings and lessons of comfort, which must before a great while be hushed by death, will seem to come back to some who were wont to listen to it with more or less attention. I, being dead, shall yet speak to them or to their children.

I have also had in view that these short expositions may be sometimes profitably used at family worship.

Moreover, there will be found in the treatment of some of the subjects, I hope, a plain refutation of errors which are spreading among us, and are not unlikely to continue to do so.

My belief is, that there is not a single error prevailing among us but what has long been anticipated by the Sacred writers. Consequently,

no great learning and no deep argumentative reasoning are required to put people on their guard against false teachings. We are many times warned that false teachers would abound in the latter days. Such false teachings began even in the Apostles' times. The errors, as against truth, of the present day are only those which have sprung and developed from the roots of errors in their days. Consequently, our Lord's teaching and the Apostles' writings, all in corroboration of the Old Testament writings, are sufficient testimony as to what is Truth and what is contrary to Truth.

Our Lord's words surely hold good as they did in His day: 'Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.' And so wrote His Apostles: 'Try the spirits, whether they be of God. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.'

I can only hope that I have not darkened counsel by the way I have handled these things, and that, in spite of all imperfections, it may

please God to make what I have written useful to some who may be led by them to search the Scriptures for themselves, to see if these things be so.

I have observed no special order in the arrangement of subjects, except that the deeper doctrines are interspersed with the lighter subjects, so as to be more interesting to those who may be reading them in the order in which they occur.

PETWORTH, 1890.

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*GLEANINGS FROM A MINISTRY  
OF FIFTY YEARS.*



I.

EXPERIENCE OF YOUTH AND AGE.

‘I have been young, and now am old ; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed (children) begging bread.’

*Psalm xxxvii. 25.*

THIS, as you see, is the experience of an aged man. It occurs in a Psalm full of encouraging thoughts to those who are trusting in the Lord. There are many very precious thoughts in it. A contrast is drawn between the fretting carefulness of evil-doers and the peace which the righteous should have. David’s experience is valuable, both as a God-fearing man, and as a writer who was inspired. Though he ended life on a throne, and therefore a rich man, he had been a poor man at first, and almost a wandering beggar at times. He made his observations

## 2 *Experience of Youth and Age.*

on mankind, and he tells us his experience. He had seen wicked men flourishing one day, but the next cut down like the grass. But he always saw it was well with the righteous, and that the 'steps of a good man were ordered by the Lord, and though he might fall, he was not cast down, for the Lord held him up with His hand.' And this was his experience, which all saints could confirm: 'I have been young, but now am old, yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, or his children begging their bread.'

In this way an aged minister has the advantage over younger ones. His experience of what he has seen of God's dealings is profitable for his people. He has been naturally led to make special observations, especially among the poor, but also among those who from rank and wealth have been brought down to the level of the poorest. And if we have seen these things with the eyes of the inspired Psalmist, we too can say, 'I never saw the righteous forsaken, or his children become beggars.'

Doubtless there are cases of the children of good and pious parents who have become poor and needy, and some might point to them as proofs that the promise did not hold good always. But a little closer observation would show that in such cases God has not failed in

His promises, and that where parents and children have alike been seekers of His righteousness, and really trusting in the Lord, He has never forsaken them.

I have myself observed that upon inquiring into the history of some who have become paupers, and dependent on the parish for support, their poverty is in many cases to be accounted for by either their own blameable conduct, or by the neglect of their parents, who have been, in this way at least, not righteous.

Observe how many reasons there are why this security of the righteous against desertion must be made good to them.

For one thing, God's very faithfulness to keep a covenant-promise is good security.

The 'righteous' means here, as elsewhere, those who trust God ; or, in other words, have really fled to Him to lay hold of the appointed refuge for the guilty. Not self-righteous, but sinners pleading their guilt, and wanting to be made righteous.

The 'righteous' here are those who lay hold of the covenant in Christ, and for His sake are accounted righteous, and can claim God's promises made to all such. By their faith in Christ they are placed in relationship to God as children of His family, for whom He binds



#### 4 *Experience of Youth and Age.*

Himself to provide for all they can want for time and for eternity. They may be brought very low and cast down, but never can be cast away. He hath said, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' He loves them with an everlasting love. Having given them the greatest of all His gifts—His own Son—with Him He freely gives all things ; so that, as one of His servants says : 'All things are yours : the world, or life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.'

Poverty or want, in this case, cannot last long. Even in the time of dearth they shall have enough ; like the widows of old be marvellously helped. Poverty may have lessons for them, which when learnt will enrich them both in spiritual riches, and in His time a supply of this world's goods. 'God will supply all their need according to His riches of glory in Christ.'

But note further, that God works by laws, which laws cannot be broken. One of His laws we know is that as a man sows so he reaps. The character of the righteous causes him always to be a sower of good seed, even of earthly blessings. He is upright, honest—for the righteous man hateth lying—diligent, and

industrious. He cannot be idle, or indulge in waste or excess of drink, and it is a law of nature that he that is thus honest and industrious reaps a sufficiency of earth's honours and earth's good things. 'Seest thou a man diligent in business? he shall stand before kings, and not before mean men.'

However humble a poor man may be, if thus righteous in this sense, he is sure to get on, as we say, and prosper. His name is a small fortune to him. His worth to good men is known. His services are valuable, and he can never want. He may have his share of hard times, he may have to struggle at times against unavoidable adverse circumstances, as sickness, or accident, or misfortunes in his family, but while these things may bring him low, and cause him for a time to say: 'These things are against me,' yet his very righteousness leads him to commit all his cares and anxieties to his Heavenly Father; and then, as it is here said, he finds 'The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord . . . Though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him.'

The devil may have plotted evil against him, but God meant it for his good. His very adversity has taught him lessons of trust and dependence he would not otherwise have learnt;

## 6 *Experience of Youth and Age.*

and neither he nor his family are driven to want. On the contrary, God may be intending, as with Job, only to bless him in his latter end more than his beginning.

But it may still be asked, How about his children? Do not good and righteous men's children sometimes come to beg their bread? Was not Eli a good man, yet, his children sank to the lowest depths of vice and consequent suffering?

But the answer is that parents like Eli may be righteous in all except the one point of failure in bringing up their children. Foolish and indulgent, not correcting or restraining, 'a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.' They reap as they sow.

But where the righteous deal wisely in bringing up children in 'the nurture and admonition of the Lord,' where the seeds of God's grace are in the child's heart, in answer to prayer and in response to careful instilling of good principles into them while young, surely God does keep His word.

We may fail and our children may fail in the conditions of the covenant, but God cannot deny Himself. He is faithful that hath promised. Heaven and earth shall pass before there is a failure on His part. 'Seek ye first the kingdom

*Experience of Youth and Age.* 7

of God and His righteousness, and all things shall be added unto you.'

When we can say 'The Lord is my shepherd,' we shall certainly be able to say, 'I shall not want; surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

## II.

### FIRST TEACHINGS TO TIMID SEEKERS.

‘There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews :

‘The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a Teacher sent from God : for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him.

‘Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

‘Nicodemus saith unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old ? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born ?

‘Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

‘Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

‘The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

‘Nicodemus answered and said unto Him, How can these things be ?’

*St. John iii. 1-9.*

THIS talk of our Lord with Nicodemus is very important. Some great truths came out of it.

What our Lord told Nicodemus staggered him at first, but evidently had a good effect on him, and was the beginning of a good work in him. Mention is again made of him in chapter vii. and after our Lord's death in chapter xix. In the first instance he pleaded for justice to be done to an accused man. In the next he was paying honour to His body in conjunction with Joseph of Arimathea, who also was probably a secret believer. This shows that Nicodemus, though startled at what our Lord said to him about 'being born again,' was not offended. He became a disciple, a defender, a witness, and probably a devoted follower in after-days.

We view him first as an encouraging example of an earnest though timid seeker after truth ; and they who thus seek the Lord and hunger after righteousness are sure to be met by God and be satisfied.

You will note two things about his state of mind at that time besides his earnestness. He was dissatisfied with his present knowledge of Divine things. He was timid in his efforts after more knowledge. This timidity led him to come under cover of night. He was a Pharisee and a ruler, a member, that is, probably of the Jewish Sanhedrim, and a man in a high position in life. He was an exceptional character among his own

10 *First Teachings to Timid Seekers.*

order, for most of the Pharisees were bitter opponents of Christ, and not many of the rulers believed on Him. It was the common people only who heard Him gladly, and became disciples. But Nicodemus did not love the praise of men more than the praise of God. Ashamed for the time, but not hindered thereby, what he could not do by day, like Gideon, he did by night. The fear of man may hinder weak faith, but it will never keep the sincere sinner from seeking safety for his soul. His knowledge was imperfect. His words to Jesus proved this. He called Him 'Master,' and so He was. 'A teacher come from God,' and that He was.

But he did not know Him as the Son of God. His miracles, he rightly said, proved that God was with Him. But he did not see that those miracles proved that God was in Him. He came to Him as a great Prophet, like unto Moses or Elijah. But had he known more, he would have seen in Him one who 'came down from Heaven, the Son of Man which is in Heaven' (v. 13). This is not surprising. It was, and is, difficult to see and believe. 'God manifest in the flesh' is a great mystery without doubt. It is one of those spiritual truths which must be spiritually discerned. This is what the

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Apostle says : 'No man can say Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.'

This I think accounts for the way our Lord addressed him at once. 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again (or from above), he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Observe, 'cannot see.' The kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. A kingdom of grace and of glory. A kingdom begun here in the hearts of the King's subjects, but one day to fill the world with its glory. None can see this in the sense of understanding and appreciating it, except they be spiritually taught and drawn of the Father to come to Christ and submit to Him as their King. Therefore, they must be born again. Christ may be to us as Nicodemus regarded Him at first, as a Teacher among human teachers. But we must be led to come to Him, and trust in Him as our Spiritual Teacher—the great and holy Prophet come down from heaven—and so learn of Him and be taught by the Father the truth about the kingdom in a far higher way than any man can teach. What Nicodemus failed to see from all the learning of the Jewish doctors he learnt from Christ. And as he listened to Him, and thought upon His words, no doubt the Spirit began His work, enlightening him to see the



12 *First Teachings to Timid Seekers.*

things of God. Never forget this: 'No man can come to Me, except the Father which sent Me draw him.' The eyes of our understanding must be enlightened to see the kingdom of God. To the natural man these things appear foolishness. But spiritually discerned, even by a babe in Christ, they are the 'power of God unto salvation.'

But Nicodemus was also being taught how to enter, and not only see, the kingdom of God. So when he had stated his difficulty—'How can a man be born again when he is old?'—his Divine Teacher said further, 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' Water and the unseen air are here figures used to express the means which act on our minds and heart to produce this change. The word translated 'wind' is the same word translated 'spirit.' So it is said, 'The wind bloweth where it listeth; thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.' Thus, the two agencies which produce the change are compared to the two elements in nature, 'air and water.' The one we depend on for life, the other cleanses us and quenches our thirst. The Holy Spirit of

*First Teachings to Timid Seekers.* 13

God is free as air. Like the wind, which is air in motion, man cannot control it. He knows it is in active force by the effects of it, not by sight. So the Holy Spirit acts independently of man. A man feels himself, or sees its effects on other men's consciences convincing them, on their wills turning them Godwards, on their motives, on their affections, on their lives and characters, and thus they know the Spirit is at work, and this change is called being born of the Spirit. But that which is born of the flesh remains fleshly, unspiritual, till this change is wrought, and then to be 'spiritually-minded is life and peace.'

But the figure of water explains the need of cleansing. The guilt of the sinner must be washed away. The Blood of the Lamb of God sprinkled cleanseth from all unrighteousness. And these two operations go together. Water and blood came out of the side of Jesus on the cross. The cleansing of the sinner for the kingdom is by the 'washing of the water by the Word' (Ephesians v. 26). 'Now ye are clean,' said the Lord, 'through the Word I have spoken.' This was also set before the ruler of the Jews. 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish,

#### 14 *First Teachings to Timid Seekers.*

but have eternal life.' All this Nicodemus would understand afterwards. When Jesus was crucified, dead, buried, and risen, and ascended, and when the Holy Ghost came down and quickened men's souls, and took of the things of Christ, and showed them both their sins and His righteousness; then he would no more say, 'How can these things be?' but 'These things are indeed so. I am healed and cleansed. I can see what I was once unable to see. And I am taught to love Him who loved me, and gave Himself for me.'

And so, dear friends, must it be with each of us.

If we begin like Nicodemus, we shall end like him, if we only follow on to know the Lord. No one teaches like Jesus. 'Learn of Me,' says He, 'for I am meek and lowly of heart.' He leads on gently as we are able to bear. He never quenches the smoking flax or breaks the bruised reed. We may have masters of Israel, from whom we learn much—ministers, pastors, and teachers. But sometimes they may, like this master of Israel, not know or be able to teach all we want to learn. Flesh and blood cannot reveal what God's Holy Spirit only can teach. We must be taught of God the things of God. We must get at the mind of Christ.

*First Teachings to Timid Seekers.* 15

We may have had the outer washing of water, and yet lack the inward cleansing of the Word. Real faith in the Word is the chosen vehicle for conveying the Spirit of Life to our souls, and also for cleansing away guilt and justifying us from all unrighteousness.

Like Nicodemus and other disciples, we may at first be slow at understanding these things. But, like him, and like Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning of Him, the Spirit will act on our souls, making us stronger in our faith, truer in our love, bolder in our confession, and more earnest in our service for the Master we love.

### III.

## WANTING TO SEE JESUS.

‘ And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast :

‘ The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired of him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.

‘ Philip cometh and telleth Andrew : and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.

And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified.

‘ Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone : but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

‘ He that loveth his life shall lose it ; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

‘ If any man serve Me, let him follow Me ; and where I am, there shall also My servant be : if any man serve Me, him will My Father honour.’

*St. John xii. 20-26.*

THESE Greeks were probably Gentiles who had attached themselves to the Jewish worship, and, having come to Jerusalem at one of the stated festivals for the purpose of worship, and having heard of the fame of Jesus, naturally expressed a wish to see Him. This wish was conveyed by His disciples to Jesus Himself.

His reply was remarkable, and very different from what would have been expected. He did not say, 'Let them come, and I will talk to them, or manifest Myself to them.' He replied, 'The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified,' and then added the simile about a grain of wheat dying in the ground and springing up and bringing forth many grains like itself.

It is not difficult to see what He meant and why He so answered these seekers after truth, as they probably were. He did as good as say to them, 'If you wish to see Me in a way which is best for you, and most to the glory of God, you have only to wait a little while, for the hour is close at hand when I shall be put into the grave as dead, but My Father will glorify Me by raising Me up again; and by-and-by you will see the fruits of My death and resurrection in the many souls that will be gathered through Me to the Father.' As if a man asked to see a grain of wheat, of which for the first time he had heard, and is told, if he wanted to see it to its greatest advantage, let him wait till it has been put into good soil, died, and sprung up and brought forth fifty or sixty grains like itself. Thus would these seekers after Jesus, if they followed on to know the Lord, see Him with the eyes of faith

in all His glory when, at the right hand of God, He would send down the Holy Ghost, as on the day of Pentecost, and they themselves might be among those who, seeing and believing, would have life through His Name.

This is the way to see Jesus for our good and happiness. We might have seen Him in the days of His flesh, and got no good at all, any more than did multitudes who in those days saw Him and yet were in no way the better, because they saw only with the eyes of the body, and, not seeing Him with the eye of faith, they died in their sins.

Thus, then, we learn that the grandest sight in the world, the glory of the plan of Redemption in the Person of the Redeemer, may be seen and found by all who wish to see Him, and is not limited to the privilege of those who lived in the days of His flesh. Undoubtedly it was a great privilege. Many kings, prophets, and righteous men desired to see those days. We are right in esteeming Peter and John, and all His devoted followers, men and women, very much blessed in having lived in those days. Our Lord even says Himself, 'The days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and shall not see them.' At the same time, it is most important to remember

that He said also, 'Thomas, because thou hast seen, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.'

We see Him not, yet believing, we love Him, and rejoice with joy unspeakable. We see Him as revealed to the eye of faith in the words, 'written that we may believe, and believing may have life through His Name.' So writes the Apostle who was privileged to see, possibly first in the flesh, but certainly in the third heaven, and then says: 'We all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' This is the great point—to see with open face, that is, having had the veil taken away from our vision which hides Him from so many, and which veil must be done away by Christ Himself. So He promises: 'I will manifest Myself unto him'; 'Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty.' This precious promise is to be fulfilled to believers on earth first, then in glory. For this end the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we behold His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. We may receive of His fulness, and receive grace in us corresponding to grace in Him. It is a transforming sight. As we gaze on



His beautiful character, His wondrous love in suffering and dying for us—His constant, unchanging love, which is to last through all eternity—His spirit enters our souls and changes us more and more into the same image. This it is to be putting on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Let us, then, desire to see Jesus. Let it be our prayer: 'Lord, manifest Thyself unto me more and more.' Let it be our aim every day that we read about Him in the Scriptures. Let us ask that the Spirit of Christ may take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us more and more. We have heard of Him by the hearing of the ear, but, with Job, let us aim at being able to say: 'Now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.' What we are in ourselves will be humbling. What we are in Christ will be glorious.

## IV.

### JESUS OUR PROPHET.

‘ I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and I will put My words in his mouth ; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.’—*Deuteronomy* xviii. 15.

‘ And there came a fear on all : and they glorified God, saying, That a great Prophet is risen up among us ; and, That God hath visited His people.’—*St. Luke* vii. 16.

‘ Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all people.’—*St. Luke* xxiv. 18.

‘ Sir, I perceive that Thou art a Prophet.’—*St. John* iv. 19.

To know Jesus aright, we must know Him in His three offices as our Prophet, Priest, and King. Thoroughly to understand this is to be acquainted with all the great essential doctrines of our faith. To be ignorant of any one leads to error, and finds us faulty in our faith. The meaning of the word ‘ Christ ’ is ‘ the anointed one.’ Prophets, priests and kings were always anointed for their office. ‘ God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost.’ This anointing is referred to in Isaiah lxi. and other places.

In each of these offices it is our privilege to know Him as personally exercising them toward ourselves. He is as a Prophet your Teacher ; as a Priest, yours to officiate for you ; as a King, we are His subjects, and He will give us a share in the kingdom which is to be. We will consider each of these offices separately.

The prophet comes first in order of our need and experience.

The promise to Israel was : 'The Lord shall raise up a prophet from among your brethren like unto me.'

From the day Moses uttered these words the Jews were expecting a prophet, and, when Jesus came in the flesh, men asked, 'Art Thou that prophet?' or said, 'This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.'

A prophet's office was to declare God's mind to the people, to proclaim His will, to foretell what God would do, to warn as a watchman. Prophets received special revelations from God ; they then spoke or wrote accordingly. They thus often read the thoughts of men's hearts, but not as Christ did with the all-seeing eye of God, but as God revealed such secrets to them. 'God spoke to them by visions, by dreams, or by angels.

When Jesus told a woman of her past and

present sins, she said, 'Sir, I perceive Thou art a prophet.'

A prophet often had power to perform great miracles, as did Moses, as did Elijah and Elisha.

But in every one of these respects Christ was the greatest Prophet that ever came into the world, and that because He was, and is, the Son of God. Other prophets were largely endued with the Holy Spirit, but Christ had the Spirit without measure. God was in Him. The Spirit of Christ was in the prophets of old. 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' Other prophets only said, 'Thus saith the Lord.' Jesus spoke with authority of God: 'Verily, I say unto thee.'

When He came into the world, He revealed God's mind and did His will. No man before could say, 'I came down from heaven,' or speak of himself as 'the Son of Man which is in heaven.' None could ever have used such language and say, 'I and the Father are one.' 'No man hath seen God but the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father; He hath declared Him.'

As a prophet, He forewarned men of the evil their sin was bringing upon them. As a prophet, He foretold of the destruction of the city and temple, of which ruin there were no signs then.

As a prophet, He foretold many of the events which should befall the world and His people as they came to pass a few years after, and are now in process of fulfilment. As a prophet, He told them often of the things which were passing in their minds at the time, for 'He knew what was in man, and needed not that any man should tell Him.'

Jesus is still the Prophet of His people. Since the days of Malachi there have been no special prophets for Israel. Then came John the Baptist, the forerunner, 'the greatest born among women.' Then this greatest of all, Jesus Christ, the anointed Prophet for Jew and Gentile. He is our Prophet now. We need no other. We have all the writings of former prophets in the Old Testament, and we have the prophecies and utterances of Jesus written in the New Testament.

Before Jesus left the earth, He promised to send the Holy Ghost to inspire His servants to remember and record many of His sayings, and to show them things that were to come. The spirit of prophecy was especially poured out upon St. John, and we have the words of Jesus in the Book of Revelation.

Jesus, then, is our Prophet still. We go and consult His words in order to know God's will.

His Word is a 'discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.' His Spirit convinces us of our sins, and shows us the cure for every sin. His words put a right view on all things that we have ever said and done.

The prophets of old were wont to give signs that God had spoken by them. Jesus, our Prophet, gave many signs. The greatest of all is His own resurrection. This He foretold should come to pass as it did. Do we want further signs? 'Behold,' He says, 'I and the children which God hath given Me are for signs and wonders.' Every converted person is a sign proving the power that is in Christ to change hearts, and the power that is in the Gospel to save everyone that believeth.

But, like the prophets of old, Jesus is a Teacher, a Reprover, and a Counsellor. We go to Him in trouble, and He gives comfort. We pour out our hearts before Him, and He speaks peace to us, and says, 'Go in peace; the Lord perform all thy petitions.'

Our Prophet thus teaches us by the inspired words of His Apostles applied by the same Spirit. But He also teaches us by His servants, who labour among us in 'word and doctrine.'

So the teachers and preachers in the Apostles' days were called prophets, as St. Paul writes :

‘He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, to exhortation, and to comfort.’

But never forget to give the first honour to Jesus, as still the great Prophet like unto Moses, to whom we are to hearken.

We receive our words from Him, and declare them unto you. But if profitable, ours is a ‘ministration of the Spirit.’ Our speech and preaching is not to be ‘with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.’

So may we all be taught by our Great Prophet Himself, ‘Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.’ Then we shall not be ‘carried about with divers and strange doctrines, but our hearts will be established with grace.’

## V.

### CHRIST OUR HIGH PRIEST.

‘ But this Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

‘ Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.

‘ For such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens ;

‘ Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for His own sins, and then for the people’s : for this He did once, when He offered up Himself.

‘ For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity ; but the Word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.’

*Hebrews vii. 24-28.*

‘ Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

‘ By a new and living Way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh ;

‘ And having a high priest over the house of God ;

‘ Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.’

*Hebrews x. 19-22.*

IT is impossible to overrate the importance of the doctrine of the priesthood of Christ.



You see how largely the writer of this epistle dwells on it. He had good reasons. The Hebrews he wrote to were clinging to the priesthood of Aaron. He would transfer their adherence to that of Christ. He reminds them that Christ was the only priest now, a priest not of the sons of Levi, but after the order of Melchizedec.

There were but these two orders—one instituted under the law of Moses ; one dating from the days of Abraham, who paid tithes to Melchizedec, priest of the Most High God in his days.

He reminds them of how David in the Psalms had spoken of this order, and of Christ, who was made a priest, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life—‘Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec.’

It is a large subject—I can only treat it slightly here. We should often ponder on the contents of this epistle. As there was a temptation in those days to cling to earthly human priests, so there is now, and thus to interrupt our personal dealings with Christ as our great High Priest.

When Christ, as our High Priest, offered up Himself to God, and so passed into the heaven itself for us, then all the old order of priesthood

and temple worship passed away ; the shadow gave way to the substance.

Hence it was that in the very act of offering the sacrifice on the Cross the veil of the temple, which separated the Holy of Holies, was rent in twain, to signify that now the worshippers might have free access into the very presence of God. That access had been hitherto only for the priest under the law, and that not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people.

‘The Holy Ghost—this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest while as yet the first tabernacle was standing.’ Now he says : ‘Christ being come a High Priest of good things to come, with His own blood is gone into heaven itself.’

How great the difference ! Instead of a building made with hands, heaven itself is the temple and the sanctuary. Instead of a succession of frail, dying priests, often offering up sacrifices, which were a remembrance of sins which could not be taken away by those sacrifices, there is one great High Priest, the eternal Son of God, who once for all has offered the one great sacrifice for sins, and then sat down at the right hand of God for ever, establishing for us an ‘unchangeable priesthood.’

This gives the sinner boldness to enter into the holiest. He has a High Priest over the House of God—a heart sprinkled from an evil conscience. His sins so washed out that he has ‘no more conscience of sin’ condemning and accusing him. He has no more need of any other offering, as it is said: ‘Now where remission of these is there is no more offering for sin.’ This is why Jesus could not remain with us. ‘If He were on earth, He would not be a priest;’ but being the Son of God He can act as our priest, as if he were on earth. He can receive our prayers; He absolves us from our sins. He receives our gifts; ‘by Him we can offer the sacrifice of praises—that is, the fruit of our lips.’ In all things pertaining to the worship and service of God, Jesus is our great High Priest.

All that human nature wants in a priest we have in Him. The throne of grace is our confessional. His ear is there to hear our secret sins. His heart is there, ‘touched with the feeling of our infirmities.’ His voice is there with the authority of God to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. What want we more?

He delegates this office and this authority to no man. None can forgive sins but God only.

None can sympathize fully as He does ; none can bless as He does.

The office of priesthood under the law was most jealously guarded. Those who presumed to interfere with it were punished most severely. Witness Korah, Dathan, and Abiram ; Uzza for touching the Ark ; Jeroboam offering incense and making priests not of Levi ; King Uzziah, with the incense in his hand, smitten with leprosy on the spot. Thus was it impressed on men's minds that God was indeed a holy God, and must only be approached through His own appointed way.

Does not God jealously guard that office now as pertaining only to Him for whom He witnesses 'Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec' ?

After Christ's ascension, all altar worship ceased. All priests were useless. They might wear the gorgeous dress of the Aaronic order, they might have their lambs without blemish, their incense, their mitres with holiness inscribed, but no worshipper would be profited thereby. It had all waxed old and decayed in God's mind. Even the temple itself, beautiful to look at, had no glory because of the glory that excelled it and superseded it, the glory of the only begotten Son of God. His body was

the temple in which dwelt the fulness of the Godhead. He was priest, altar, sacrifice all in one. Men needed not to worship in one place or another so long as they worshipped in spirit and in truth, in the Name of Christ, pleading His merits, believing in His power.

So now our churches and chapels are not to be copies of the temple or tabernacle, which were only figures of the true tabernacle.

We have not to do with 'patterns' of those good things themselves which we possess. We have the 'new and living way' into the immediate presence of God.

We must be careful not in anywise to confuse things that are so different, lest the material things which are seen rob us of the real things which are only seen with the eye of faith.

As we have no need of an altar for sacrifice, no priest to offer it, no need for a fresh remembrance of sin remitted by the one offering of our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, so we look not for these things in our churches.

St. Paul speaks of no other priests than Christ. He speaks of prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, for these we need and have. If we speak of priests in our church, it is only in the sense of presbyters or elders.

If we call the Lord's Supper a sacrifice, it is

only a sacrifice for praise and thanksgiving, not a repetition of that which is offered once for all.

The Lord's table is not an altar in this sense. Our Lord sat down with His disciples at an ordinary table, and so instituted that which should be ever a remembrance of His own sacrifice, and so a means of grace to their souls.

How thankful should we be that we have such a Priest—holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, merciful, faithful, never-dying, never-wanting in sympathy, always ready and willing to hear, and 'able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him.' Let us use Him as our Priest, coming often and 'boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.'

## VI.

### CHRIST THE KING OF KINGS.

‘Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion ; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem : behold thy King cometh unto thee : He is just, and having salvation ; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.’—*Zechariah* ix. 9.

‘The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David : and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.’—*St. Luke* i. 32, 33.

‘And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.’—*Revelation* xix. 16.

‘Thy kingdom come.’—*St. Matthew* vi. 10.

WE have seen how Christ is our Prophet, the great Teacher come from God, the High Priest through whom we enjoy free access to God, and now we have to consider Christ as the great King, ‘the King of kings.’

This is also a very wide subject, and can only be touched upon here.

In what sense Christ is our King, and will some day rule and reign over the whole world, is a matter we ought clearly to understand. We cannot otherwise rightly pray ‘Thy kingdom

come.' Nor can we otherwise understand and appreciate the glorious promises which affect the Church of God and the whole world. The Scriptures are very full of the subject from beginning to end. We ought all to be gladly welcoming the thought that one day the Lord will be King over the whole world, that the saints of the Most High will reign with Him, and that all the kingdoms of the world will eventually become 'the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.'

It is in view of this prophetic fact that the Gospel dispensation is sometimes called the 'kingdom of heaven' and the 'kingdom of God.'

The Prophets and the Psalms had so plainly foretold of the setting up of this kingdom, that the Israelites of old were always looking for a king who should come and establish a kingdom. Isaiah and Zechariah and Daniel and other prophets and the Psalmist had all so plainly predicted that a king should reign in righteousness, that God would set His holy King on Sion, and give Him 'the utmost parts of the earth for His inheritance,' that God's people were not surprised at the angel who announced His birth, foretelling also that He should 'sit on the throne of His father David, and of His kingdom there should be no end.'



Satan knew this, and tempted Him by offering all the glory of the kingdoms of earth before He had fulfilled His work as Priest, if he would but own allegiance to him as the prince of this world.

Now, it is just because Satan has been, and still in a measure is, the prince that rules and reigns over this world, that Christ has come into the world and is now going forth conquering and to conquer, that when he has put all things under His feet He may take in His own hands all rule, and all authority, and all power, and reign. He is manifested to thus 'destroy the works of the devil.' We are not to think of this world as always to be the scene of the devil's triumph. The devil must be dethroned. Christ and His saints must take his place, and bring all the world under His righteous rule. Christ is gone to receive the kingdom. He has paid the ransom for all His subjects, and when all who are to share His rule with Him are redeemed and gathered in, then 'My God shall come and all the saints with thee,' and 'the Lord shall be King over all the earth and His Name One' (Zechariah xiv.).

This is the kingdom for which we pray that it should come and cause the will of God to be done in all the world. It is true He reigns

now, inasmuch as His people's wills are being subdued, and 'the kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.' But it is also true that He will yet sit upon the throne of His Father David, and His kingdom be co-extensive with the whole heathen world.

It is true that the Gospel of the kingdom is being first proclaimed among all nations, but it is not so the whole world will be evangelized. But multitudes are being thus first gathered in who shall help to swell the Host who shall reign and rule over the world some day. These times and seasons the Father hath put in His own power, when He will thus restore the kingdom to Israel. 'And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given unto the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all kingdoms shall serve and obey Him' (Daniel vii. 27).

Now, see the importance of holding this view of Christ's kingdom. It explains much of Scripture otherwise unintelligible. For example, our Lord's promise to the Apostles, 'Ye shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' We can see the meaning of the promises of righteous rule, great prosperity, and great

fertility, in the 72nd Psalm, a prophecy of Christ's kingdom; and of the 45th Psalm, 'the good matter, the things made touching the King,' and the promise, 'instead of thy fathers, shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth.'

The rewards for the righteous are crowns, not as victors only but as rulers. Some over a few cities, some over many. 'The Lord will give me a crown of righteousness. . . . He will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom.'

This will constitute the glory which Christ wants His people both to see and to share. 'Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty.' 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne. . . .' And again, 'He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron' (Revelations ii.).

And all this always connected with His 'appearance and His kingdom.'

This kingdom in heaven the saints of the first resurrection share. This righteous rule on earth the whole world will enjoy. A time of universal peace and blessedness. Nations learning war no more. Satan tempting no more. The know-

ledge of the Lord covering the whole earth. The darkness of mysteries passing away, and the sun no more darkened by clouds of ignorance and superstition. The curse on the soil removed. The troubled sea of 'many peoples' no more threatening to overwhelm with lawlessness and abounding iniquity, causing men's hearts to fail. The kingdom itself is world-wide and lasting because it 'cannot be shaken.'

Not only do we thus get a key that unlocks so many mysteries of the future, but an answer to the great problems that cannot otherwise be solved. What shall be the end of all the evil that is in the world? How long shall the adversary reproach, and the wicked triumph, and the whole creation groan, and the oppressor and the persecutor trouble the innocent, and the ungodly boast in his pride and say, 'Tush! God does not see'?

All these and the like questions are answered in the promises of God's Word rightly understood. Men of this world see it not, and vainly think to stem the torrent of evil by legislation. The philosopher sees it not, and vainly talks of how one day the world will be improved through the discoveries of science, though when and how exactly he cannot tell us. The scoffer says, 'Where is the promise of His coming—we see

no signs? Things will go on as they have been.'

But the secret of these mysteries is with him who, like the prophets of old, has the Spirit of Christ, which in a measure reveals to them the reason of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that shall follow.

Let us be of that number. Ever searching into the Scriptures and asking for grace to see and to long for the glory that shall be revealed.

God's voice once shook the earth; but now He hath promised, saying, 'Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire' (Hebrews xii.).

## VII.

### CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION.

‘ I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord ; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.’—*Psalm xxxii.* 5.

‘ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’—*1 John i.* 8, 9.

‘ Only acknowledge thine iniquity that thou hast transgressed against the Lord.’—*Jeremiah iii.* 13.

THESE are but a few instances which prove from Old and New Testament that forgiveness of sins is promised after confession of sins.

David extols the blessedness of the man who is forgiven. He himself at one time knew not this blessedness, and gives the reason, ‘ when I kept silence.’ Only after confession to the Lord did he gain that peace and happiness which come from a sense of forgiveness on God’s part. It is only self-deception that keeps any back from a sense of sin. We deceive ourselves as to the nature or extent of sin ; or as to

God's notice of it, and His requirements. So we know how it was thus with David for a time, till Nathan wrung from Him the confession, 'I have sinned.' Then came the absolution from God's own mouth, 'The Lord hath put away thy sin ; thou shalt not die.'

David knew, under the old covenant, as we well know under the new, 'without shedding of blood there is no remission.' He prayed therefore, 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.' This was an application to the blood of the Lamb, which alone taketh away sin.

It is mercy that provides this remedy, but St. John refers to other attributes besides mercy ; He is 'faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse.'

It is well to mark this. Many cry, 'God be merciful to me,' and they are right. But it is more than mercy that gives the sinner well founded hopes. In spite of God being very merciful, many, we are told, come short of pardon and perish.

Our reliance is on God's being faithful to keep the promises made to the sinner who relies on the sacrifice by Christ, and on His truthfulness in respect of the promises made to everyone that comes to Him through Christ. This is

a stronger plea than mere mercy, for it is impossible for God to be unfaithful or untrue. If He has laid your sins on Christ when He died on the cross, He will not lay them again on you. If He has scored out your debt for Christ's sake, He is not so unjust as to require payment over again from you.

But it is mercy in the first place that makes necessary the condition of confession. Confession proves sense of guilt. Confession proves real penitence. Confession tests sincerity in our wish to get rid of both the guilt and the bondage of sin.

These remarks refer to two classes of people; to the unconverted sinner who has not yet in penitence returned to his Father's house, but also to the true disciple who, like David, has need again and again of assuring himself that his conscience is void of offence towards God, and towards man, and to say, 'Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.'

As regards the first confession, it is the result of the working of conscience by the law of God, brought home by the Spirit, whose office it is to convince of sin. At first of sin in a general way, like the publican's 'God be merciful to me, a sinner'; like the prodigal, 'I will arise and go to my father, and say, Father, I have sinned



against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son ; make me as one of thy hired servants.'

No one can doubt that this general confession is a mark of true and real repentance. All men acknowledge they are sinners and must be beholden to God for mercy.

The danger is lest we should stop short with this general view of sin and our guilt.

Real sorrow for past sins and the frequent inclination to depart from God, and so fall short of true holiness, will lead the penitent to reflect with grief on all his past omissions and failures in God's service. He will confess that, judged by God's spiritual law, his sins are 'more in number than the hairs of his head.' He is made to possess the sins of his youth. He sees how much he has left undone, and how much evil, consciously and unconsciously, he has been guilty of. He will regretfully confess his lost opportunities of serving God. The evils his example has wrought on others is a thought that will trouble him. He will remember how many secret sins, sins of unbelief, and sins of pollution, sins of covetousness, selfishness and pride, he has been guilty of ; and he will often see sins where the world sees none, or even sees virtue. And all these thoughts, self-condemn-

ing, will again and again wring from him the sincere cry, 'God be merciful to me, cleanse me from secret sins, blot out all my transgressions.' And as he feels his own inability to offer anything but an unworthy offering of an unclean heart to God, he will prize exceedingly that faithfulness on God's part to keep the covenant made with Christ the sin-bearer, and God's truthfulness to keep His promise that if we confess He will forgive.

But the experience of every Christian is probably this : that such detail in confessing our sins before God is generally the result of a later and deeper sense of God's forgiving love ; so that it even seems as if we saw ourselves to be sinners in the strongest light after we have been assured of our pardon. And the more we realize that Christ cleanses from all unrighteousness, so the more we see how many and great our transgressions have been, and this leads on to the most painful confession that though the old man is crucified within us, he is not quite slain. There remains the tendency to unbelief, to worldliness, to all manner of insidious errors and failings, and though all is indeed forgiven for Christ's sake, and we stand in no condemnation, yet the renewed confession of them is necessary in order to assure our hearts before Him. 'He that is

washed still needs to wash his feet,' though 'clean every whit.'

Then comes the important question, To whom is the confession to be made?

St. James says, 'Confess your faults to one another.' Yes, if you have wronged a brother, go and tell him your fault and his fault, that you may forgive and be forgiven trespasses against man, 'and pray for one another that ye may be healed.'

Or it may be a relief to unburden your heart to your fellow-man, your friend who knows you best and can counsel you, or to some godly minister who can tell you of Him, and help you to Him, who alone hath 'power on earth to forgive sins.'

But your assurance of pardon can only come with authority straight from Him who was wont to say, and still says to penitents, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee.' There is no absolving priest, no sacrificing priest, but He who is the 'High Priest after the order of Melchizedec.' The Apostles never mention any other priest. There is no need of any other. 'By one offering of Himself He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. We are sanctified through this offering once for all.' No more sacrifices are needed, no other priest, no other remission than this. And

is not this sufficient, 'I forgive thee'? Words which take effect either from our personal application of the words of Christ through the Spirit's teaching, or from the same Spirit bringing them home to us through the mouth or writings of a minister of the Gospel, an ambassador for Christ.

This caution is indeed necessary in these days. The rapid growth of the confessional in our land is too terrible evidence of the unbelief of men in God's forgiveness. If Christ has said to us 'thy sins are forgiven thee,' through our application of His own word to the penitent believer, we do not want a priest to forgive us.

The confessional acts as a barrier between many a poor sinner and the Saviour, the one and only High Priest. Nor is the evil of confession to man confined to the poor deluded souls that are asked to disclose the secrets of their hearts. The priest who hears the confession, and who puts questions and insinuates impure suggestions by which to draw out confessions from the poor penitent, is himself in fearful danger of being defiled by the evils he is professing to cure by asking such questions.

So writes one once a priest in the Romish Church: 'Few priests escape from falling into the pit of the most horrible depravity.' It is

painful to have to say these things, but faithfulness to our Lord and Master demands it of us.

As, then, we shrink with horror from these evils, the result of departure from the one only faithful, merciful and compassionate High Priest, let us for our part cleave all the closer to Him. He can feel more deeply for you in all your weakness and craving for sympathy than any human being on earth. And He alone can heal the wounds which the sword of the Spirit has opened up to your conscience. He alone can whisper words of peace and comfort which the world can neither give nor take away. 'The Lord God hath given him the tongue of the learned that he should know how to speak a word in season to the weary.'

## VIII.

### JUSTIFIED ONLY BY FAITH.

‘ Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law : that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

‘ Therefore by the deeds of the Law shall no flesh be justified in His sight : for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

‘ But now the righteousness of God without the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.’—*Romans* iii. 19-21.

‘ That no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident : for, The just shall live by faith.’—*Galatians* iii. 11.

HOW a sinner is to be justified in the sight of a just and holy God is the great question proposed and settled by God Himself in the Bible. And how far this is a matter set at rest in the experience of each sinner is just the very first and most important inquiry the mind of man can be set upon.

It is the starting-point in all religious life. Simple as the way is, and as it sounds, that the sinner is to be justified by faith, yet experience proves it is by no means a doctrine readily ac-

cepted by a Church or experienced by individual Christians.

In proof of this, see how the Apostle had to labour at the subject in his letters to the first Christians, see how it was quite lost sight of in all the dark ages of Christianity; and then how hard Luther found it to make men see it was the very foundation doctrine of a true Church. And, lastly, see to this day how long it takes many a sinner to believe it and to act upon it; and all because there is such a natural tendency in mankind to seek to establish his own righteousness, and not to be justified in God's appointed way.

Nothing can be plainer than the statement at the head of this chapter, that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ. And then the experience of sinners, like Saul of Tarsus, 'Even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.'

This was the great and glorious truth brought to full light by the sacrifice of our Substitute on the cross, dying for our sins, rising again for our justification.

The great question had to be solved, How can God be just and yet the Justifier of the ungodly?

A simple act of pardon founded upon mercy was not enough. God must show Himself just, holy and true, as well as loving and merciful.

Only, then, as a Substitute is found in One who fulfils all obedience, endures the curse of a broken law for man, only so could it be shown that God was still 'Just and the Justifier of the ungodly.'

From the beginning this was taught by God: 'Without shedding of blood there is no remission,' and the doctrine was shown to be as old as Abel and Abraham; and this the Apostle Paul urges upon all, that 'Abraham believed in God and was accounted righteous,' being justified by faith.

But many in his day were slow to accept the blessed truth. He writes with wonder to the Galatians as being bewitched into giving up this great truth, and building up again a system of self-justification which had been destroyed by the death and resurrection of Christ. He exhorts them to stand fast in this liberty. He reminds them that if by that one act of circumcision they are trying to be justified by works, Christ will profit them nothing. He laments over many, in another epistle, who had a 'zeal of God,' but yet were not justified, because, 'going about to establish their own righteous-



ness, they had not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God.' For, says he, 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth' (Rom. x.). The law said, the man which 'doeth these things shall live by them.' The Gospel says, 'with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.'

The Apostle often quotes from the prophet Habakkuk, 'The just shall live by his faith,' in order to show it was ordained of old. It is remarkable that this was the text that chiefly opened Luther's eyes to the way the Roman Church had departed from the faith; and he, being like St. Paul convinced of his own inability to justify himself before God, rejoiced to find this was indeed God's own way, testified throughout the whole of Scripture, and so was he able himself to rejoice in the Lord, having no confidence in the flesh, and to lay again the foundation-stone of the Reformed Churches, that a man is justified by faith, and that works follow after and not before justification.

And now comes to each of us individually the question, Am I justified in the sight of God? Am I accepted in the Beloved? Am I, like Abraham and like the disciples, a friend of God, 'justified through faith, at peace with

God through Jesus Christ, by whom I have access to God, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God'?

But our anxiety to have this question settled all depends on our conviction of sin. If sin be a light matter, and our alienation from God no trouble to us, we shall be content to leave the question unanswered. If we think our own efforts after a good life, made up by the merits of Christ, are enough, we shall be content to remain uncertain of our acceptance, only hoping with all the rest of the world to be found justified at the last. On the other hand, when sins are seen in the light of God's countenance, more in number than the hairs of our head; when sin is seen as what God cannot pass over in any sinner not yet sprinkled with the blood of a Redeemer; when conscience is thus disturbed and convinced of guilt, we cry out in real distress, 'What must I do to be saved?' Then, oh! how sweet and precious is the promise, 'Come unto Me, confess your sins, believe and be saved.' Then, indeed, it seems too good to be true. We almost find it hard to believe that to us Jesus says: 'Thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace.'

Yet it is thus He would have us rejoice that our names are written in heaven, that He loves

us, and has washed us from all our sins. He asks us to believe more that we may love more; to love more that we may serve better. This, as I have said, is the very first step in a holy life; not, as some make it, the latest act in life—on a deathbed to know that we are forgiven; but, while in health and while young enough, to give God the first-fruits of our strength, to take our stand in this relation to God and Christ: 'I am Thy servant—I am Thy servant; Thou hast loosed my bonds.'

It is when realizing our position, as 'brought nigh by the blood of Christ,' identified with Christ, the beloved Son, that he puts the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, 'whereby we cry Abba, Father,' and abiding in him, bring forth fruits of the Spirit. 'There is no condemnation then to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.' This is the only answer to the question, 'How shall a man be made just with God?' Then we can use language of triumph and say: 'If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.'

## IX.

### THE HEART DECEITFUL ABOVE ALL THINGS.

‘The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked : who can know it ?

‘I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.’—*Jeremiah* xvii. 9, 10.

No one likes to be deceived in any way. It is mortifying to find one has been taken in, cheated by another, who has taken advantage of our simplicity or our good-nature. It is humbling, and, possibly, an injury or loss to us.

But it becomes a very serious matter to be deceived in the way of getting to heaven, and of escaping the present or future evils of sin.

To this temptation everyone is liable. The world is full of deceits and frauds, and of persons too who are ‘lying in wait to deceive.’

Experience tells us all this quite independently of God’s Word. But that Word is full

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of the clearest and most pointed warnings on the subject.

It was from the father of lies that sin came to be in the world. 'He is a liar, and the father of it,' our Lord says.

And how many are the warnings against his subtle devices! And the worst is he finds in us a heart that is prone to deceive itself, and prone to love the evil to which it is tempted. So it is said, 'The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?'

'Take heed,' says the Apostle, 'lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' Would Satan get servants so ready to do his work if he did not deceive them with promises of advantage as he did our first parents? Would any of us snap at his baits if we saw the hook inside them?

For every true thing which God tells us in His Word, the devil has a counterfeit—a falsehood which looks very like the truth. All the errors of the Church of Rome and every other false system are founded upon truth. Distorted truth becomes a lie. He can 'transform himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness.'

'I fear,' says the same Apostle, 'lest as the

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serpent beguiled Eve through his subtleties, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.'

But Satan himself would hardly succeed if he did not find a readiness to be deceived — 'a deceitful heart.' It becomes doubly important in all who are searchers after truth to bring everything to the test of God's Word. One test is never enough to prove men's assertions. The devil quoted one Scripture to Christ, but Jesus could meet him with another. So must we test and try the spirits whether they be of God. For many false prophets are always in the world. And in some cases God lets people have strong delusions that they should believe a lie. But this can only be where they have refused first to receive the love of the truth that they might be saved (see 2 Thess. ii.).

'Santification of the Spirit and belief of the truth' will alone prevent such delusion.

We must never forget how it is written: 'There is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof is death.'

If we ask how it is that any will at the last be found asking for admission into heaven; to whom the Lord of heaven will say, 'I know you not!' it can only be so answered, 'The heart is deceitful; they thought they were right.' The

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foolish virgins thought they were all right when, with the wise with lamps, sleeping soundly. The man without the wedding garment thought somehow or other he would escape detection, or be suffered to remain among the guests, but he had been deceived by his own thoughts.

St. Paul says : ' Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' No farmer is so deceived as to believe where he has sowed a field with one seed he will reap quite another crop. Yet there are those who, now sowing to the flesh, expect somehow to reap the fruit of life everlasting.

We are all apt to deceive ourselves as to our true character in the sight of God. Is there not a proof of this in the way in which we so easily detect the flaws in our neighbour's character, while we are blind to our own? Like David, we are moved with anger and indignation at what we hear or see in the actions of someone else, while we ourselves at the very moment may be guilty in no lesser degree, though in another way.

We are all naturally prejudiced and biased in our own favour, and so to our own faults are blind or lenient, where to the same in others we are severe. Well may it be asked by the prophet of this deceitful heart in every man, ' Who can

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know it?' The answer must ever be, God only thoroughly reads all that passes within us. 'I the Lord search the heart.'

Our only safety against self-delusion is in our prayer to God, the searcher of all hearts: 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' We should be often engaged in the work of self-examination by the light of God's Word.

We cannot have a better sample of the prayer we should make on this subject than that with which we begin our Communion Service: 'Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee and worthily magnify Thy holy Name.'



## X.

### NONE TOO YOUNG FOR JESUS.

‘And they brought young children to Him, that He should touch them : and His disciples rebuked those that brought them.

‘But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not : for of such is the kingdom of God.

‘Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

‘And He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them.’

*St. Mark x. 13-16.*

PARENTS of little ones in those days wanted to get them into the arms of Jesus. They seemed to think they would be ‘safe in the arms of Jesus.’ Were they mistaken? No one thinks so now. Many would be glad to repeat the act if they had the opportunity and Jesus were walking among us.

But there were objectors then. Some of the disciples, who one would have thought knew better, ‘rebuked those that brought them.’

But Jesus rebuked the rebukers, ‘much dis-

pleased.' One of the few times when we read of any anger crossing the loving mind of Jesus. He was much displeased, and said, 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God.'

They were small, young children, for 'He took them,' one by one, 'in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them.'

All parents should be of the same mind with these here, and bring their children to Jesus. If they cannot be too young for His notice and His blessing, they certainly cannot be too young to stand in need of His blessing. We know how soon children will begin to learn evil and go astray. Like tender and supple plants, they must be trained while thus tender and pliable. And can we make a better beginning than by asking Jesus to bless them?

This is why we are asked to bring our children to the font to be baptized in their earliest infancy. To say the least, it is an opportunity of dedicating them to the Lord. It has always been the practice of Christians from the earliest times. And though some say the ordinance of baptism was instituted for believers, yet, as we find children were circumcised when eight days old, and thus brought into covenant with God under the old dispensation, we cannot be wrong in thus

consecrating our offspring in its infancy to the Lord of the new covenant.

Circumcision is called a 'seal of the righteousness by faith,' yet children at eight days old had no faith and were unconscious of the blessing. The children put into the arms of Jesus were not conscious of the blessing their parents were asking for them. They did not know who it was that laid His hands upon them. So it is no argument against infant baptism to say they are too young. We cannot be too young to be dedicated to God's service. We want our little ones to belong to Jesus from their earliest days.

It is true that parents too often make the ceremony a mere form, and that some only think of it as getting their child named, so that if it dies young it should have Christian burial. But this is an abuse and not a proper use of the act and ceremony.

It is also too true that sponsors are not always praying people, who act under a sense of their responsibility. But we must look at the intention of our Church in the appointment, and think how it would be if those intentions were strictly attended to, and sponsors did take an interest in the child's spiritual welfare and pray for their godchildren, and especially in the event

of parents dying or neglecting their duty towards the child while young.

Surely, our Lord would be displeased rather if we did not thus early bring our little ones to Him. And surely, when this is done with real hearty prayers of faith, and followed up by teaching, and by example, and by another dedication at Confirmation, parents would oftener see some result, as we may well suppose they did who brought their children to Jesus.

Let us gather from this incident in the life of our Lord that He likes us to bring the young, as well as the sick, to Him to be blessed. On whomsoever He laid His holy hands a blessing followed. The sick, the possessed, the deaf, the dumb, the young, were all blessed by the touch.

We may not be quite sure that these parents had not some superstitious feelings mixed up in their desires—like the mother of Zebedee's sons, who asked greater things than He had promised. Still, Jesus accepts the imperfect wishes and faith of all who come to Him, and gives more than they even desire. These asked that Jesus should touch their children. But Jesus solemnly laid His hands upon them, which was a token and sign of the conveyance of a blessing.

We read afterwards of the practice with the Apostles and elders of the early Church, and laying on of hands with prayer brought blessings, gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, endowing men for God's service.

So the Church of England appoints that children who have been brought to Jesus in infancy should, when old enough to understand and believe the doctrines of the Gospel, have a Bishop's hands laid upon them, and prayers again offered that the Spirit of Christ may rest upon them and incline them to be faithful soldiers and servants of Christ.

Let all who are parents remember that the best blessings are still in store for their offspring, if they will but bring them to Christ. His arms are still open to receive, His hands still lifted up to bless. Mind not the rebuke of the unbelieving. Heed not the sneer of the cold and indifferent worldly-minded people. Not once in youth only, nor again at Confirmation only, but often and often dedicate them to His service. He still is more ready to bless than we to receive the blessing. He says to every parent among us, 'Bring him to Me.'

## XI.

### INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE.

‘Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them ;

‘And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness :

‘That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.’

*2 Timothy iii. 14-17.*

THIS is a very important part of the Apostle's letter to Timothy. It shows how St. Paul regarded the Word of God, and how Timothy was to value and use it. It reminds us that the Bible is the Book not of man but of God, written by man under the special guidance and influence of God's Holy Spirit. He exhorts Timothy to continue in the things he has learned from it. He calls these writings ‘Holy Scriptures;’ able to make wise unto salvation as they lead to Christ through faith. They are profitable, he says,

for all the purposes we can want them for ; to 'reprove' us, showing us our sins and faults ; to 'correct' us in all points that we need alteration or improvement ; to instruct us in all 'doctrine' and practice, and so provide us with motive and power to do good works. And then he goes on, as in the next chapter, to charge this 'man of God' to preach this word, 'in season and out of season,' and the more so because the days would come when men will not endure sound doctrine, would heap up teachers of things not in the Scriptures, and many would be turned away from the truth and be turned unto fables.

You will observe, too, that what led him to dwell on the inspiration of Scripture was that 'perilous' or dangerous times were coming when, though there would be a 'form of godliness,' the power would be denied, and all sorts of wickedness would prevail, of which he gives a fearful list, adding, 'Evil men and seducers will wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.' Then the safeguard against all these errors, these false teachings and fables, and the religion of form without power, would be a continuing to take the Scriptures as the sole rule of faith, the authoritative voice of God, the only infallible guide, and the power of God unto salvation through faith in Christ.

Since those days when this was written, what we call the Scriptures are just double in quantity what they were then. The written word was probably only what we call the Old Testament. Of which St. Peter writes also, 'Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Spirit of God.' And again in another part he says, 'The Spirit of Christ was in the prophets, testifying of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow,' as 'revealed' to them. These are the writings of Moses, the Psalms, the Prophets, to which our Lord referred, saying, 'Search the Scriptures. . . . They testify of Me;' and to which He always referred the Jew as those Scriptures which could not be broken and must be fulfilled.

But when Christ had finished all His teaching on earth, and His work of suffering and resurrection and ascension, He fulfilled His own promise of the Holy Ghost coming to bring His words to remembrance, to teach or show the things concerning Him, and to glorify Him. Thus the Apostles and the Evangelists were men moved by the Spirit of God to write the Gospels and the Epistles and the Book of Revelation of St. John, all which are added to our Old Testament, and so become part of the Holy Scriptures given by inspiration of God, and



profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction.

How greatly should we value these writings, written by the finger of God (as it were) to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, giving heed as to a light which shineth in a dark world, the only true light, the only way by which the question can be answered, 'What is truth?' If true of the Old Testament, how much more of Old and New together, 'able to save your souls by making you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ.'

The will of God thus comes to us with an authority which no mere words of man can ever possess.

We hear God speaking to us in them as truly as when He spoke from Mount Sinai, or when He spoke behind the mercy-seat to Moses. If He spoke in a more direct way, as He did from Mount Sinai, we should be terrified, as the Israelites were, who asked that God would not so speak, but only through His servant Moses. He has spoken to us in these last days by His Son. The Spirit of the Son speaks in sacred writings. The mind of God comes to us through the minds of men. Only let us never forget that as God's mind was revealed to men by His Spirit, and they wrote, so now that same Spirit

must reveal His mind to us through their writings. The bare letter has no life in it. It may kill by showing us our guilt unto condemnation. 'The letter killeth; the Spirit giveth life.' Inspiration to understand is as needful as was inspiration to write the will and mind of God. It is still true 'the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; they are foolishness unto him, for they are spiritually discerned.' Praying ever for this light and wisdom from above, asking Jesus to enlighten us as He did His disciples, and that like Lydia we may have our understandings opened by Him to attend to these things spoken by God's servants, we shall find there is indeed a power in them we had not known. A power to save, a power to comfort, a power to sanctify, a power to build us up and establish us in a 'most holy faith,' and a power by degrees to conform us more and more to the image and likeness of Christ as by the Spirit of God.

St. Paul, as we know, was an inspired teacher, yet see how he expected a blessing from his teaching just as men saw through it all the message from God, the life-giving words of his Master. So he said to the Thessalonians, 'For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the Word of God,

which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.'

Oh see, dear friends, that you esteem the Words of His mouth more than your necessary food ; that you have as great delight in the words of Jesus as in all manner of riches. Let them dwell in you richly. Turn a text or a passage over and over in your mind, inwardly digesting each word that conveys a truth. A little will thus often do you more good than a long chapter, or a whole book of only human learning.

Say as you read or hear it, 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth,' and you will be confirmed more and more in your faith and your love, and be safe from ever being moved away from the blessed hope of the Gospel.

## XII.

### WHEAT AND CHAFF.

‘The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream ; and he that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat ? saith the Lord.

‘Is not My Word like as fire ? saith the Lord ; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces ?’

*Jeremiah xxiii. 28, 29.*

THERE were false prophets in those days. There always have been. Where and when the God of Truth speaks, the father of lies will also put in his word. When God spoke to Adam and Eve, it was not long before the father of lies came and spoke false. When the prophets of old spoke to God’s people, false prophets always were at hand to prophesy smooth but false things to the people. So it was in the days when Jeremiah was the true prophet, to whom the Word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah, King of Judah. In this chapter you will see it was said by God, ‘I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran : I have not

spoken to them, yet they prophesied.' They prophesied lies. They were prophets of the deceit of their own hearts. They told their dreams as if they were communications from God. So the vast difference is here laid down: 'The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord.' Then the difference in effect is referred to. 'Is not My Word like as fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?'

Now this is exceedingly important to remember, the vast difference between the Word of God and the word of man. For we are told most plainly that, as in old days there were false prophets, so in these last days there would be false teachers. The false prophets deceived people and led them astray. False teachers, of course, do the same. So St. John warns us, 'Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.' St. Paul also warns us against 'seducing spirits,' and those who should 'handle the Word of God deceitfully,' and of 'false apostles,' and of teachers who 'consent not to wholesome doctrines.'

Our Lord testified of the same false teachings, which lasted from the days of Isaiah to the times of the Jewish teachers who taught for 'doctrines the commandments of men.'

The tradition of the elders was the word of man, which was like chaff. It made void the Word of God, which was like wheat. The one was like chaff, which the wind blows away; the other like good grain, by which man gets his bread, the staff of life.

The warning is still needed, 'Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing.'

If false teaching came to us through bad men there would not be the same danger. Satan is too clever to do this. His servants can take the form and the fair speeches of angels of light.

When the old prophet deceived the man of God who was sent to prophesy against the doings of the King of Israel, he only succeeded by saying, 'I am a prophet, and an angel spake unto me.' But he lied unto him.

Shakespeare's words are remarkable on this subject:

' In religion,  
What damned error, but some sober brow  
Will bless it, and approve it with a text,  
Hiding the grossness with fair ornament ?'

When the devil tempted Christ he quoted

Scripture, because he knew our Lord trusted in that Word.

The most notable teachers of error that have ever drawn multitudes after them have often been men of whom people would say, 'How holy these men are; surely, what they hold must be good and true!'

There must then be some way in which we are to discern the wide difference between the Word of God and the word of man, the wheat and the chaff.

Let us recall the way in which the first followers of Christ were led to see this great difference between safe guidance and false teaching. In the days of our Lord the Scribes and Pharisees who sat in Moses' seat, that is, were the appointed teachers of the day, were not to be trusted as safe guides. Our Lord said they were 'blind leaders of the blind.' And when He Himself taught and spoke as never man has spoken, and with authority, and not as the Scribes, those who became His disciples and fed upon His Word were those who, like Peter and other disciples, were of this mind, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.' They took Him for their authoritative teacher, the prophet like unto Moses, and so were taught to see the difference between the false

teaching of their rulers and the true teaching which was of God. The Lord told them all to search the Scriptures, and then and afterwards those who, like the Bereans, searched the Scriptures and compared the teaching of Jesus therewith, these were led to see the difference between that which fed and satisfied their souls and that which was but like husks or ashes. 'To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this Word it is because there is no light in them' (Isaiah viii.).

The inspired Word of God must be the great authority to which all appeals must be made in answer to the inquiry, 'What is truth?' If this was the case when there was only Moses and the prophets, only the Old Testament to appeal to, how much more, when we have in addition all the inspired writings of the Evangelists and those Apostles to whom the Lord especially promised the Holy Ghost, who should guide them into all truth?

So says the Church of England. The 'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation' (Article VI.). Human



teachers we must have, but all their teaching must be capable of easy proof from God's Holy Word.

It is no argument to say many false teachers have thought to prove their teaching from Scripture. Some may wrest Scripture to their own destruction. Abuses of private judgment do not prove there is no right use of it which God will bless.

Only never forget there is a higher teaching that must ever accompany all searching after truth and all learning we get from men. When Peter made his noble confession of faith, the Lord said, 'Blessed art thou, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father, which is in heaven.' Moreover, He thanked His Father that those things which were hidden from the wise and prudent were revealed unto babes. Spiritual truths must be spiritually discerned, and as it is written in the Prophets, 'they shall all be taught of God,' so it is still true that 'everyone that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto Christ.' And again, 'If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.' Thus must we ever be asking for wisdom from above, that we may have our senses exercised to discern between wheat and chaff, truth and error, right and wrong.

The Word of God will work effectually, as no word of man will. It will melt to tears of penitence, it will break stubborn wills, it will mould men's characters, and so will prove its own power and authority. 'Is not My Word like fire, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?'

## XIII.

### CHURCH AND CHURCHES.

#### I.

‘Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it ;

‘That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word,

‘That He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing ; but that it should be holy and without blemish.’

*Ephesians v. 25-27.*

‘The Churches of Asia salute you, Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the Church that is in their house.’—  
*I Corinthians xvi. 19.*

‘The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in My right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven Churches : and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven Churches.’—*Revelation i. 20.*

THE word ‘church’ is used by us in different senses. It is very important to observe in what senses the word occurs in Scripture, and to keep as far as possible to those uses.

Of course, we may speak of our places of assemblies for Divine service as churches,

although not so used in Scripture, because they were not then built. Worship was conducted in the temple, or in synagogues, or in upper rooms.

But when we speak of church or churches in other senses, it is important to see what is the original use of the word in Scripture, because, as one of our divines (Hooker) says, 'for lack of diligent observing of which the oversights are neither few nor light that have been committed.' I believe it may truly be said that many of the grave errors held by Romanists and extreme Ritualists in our own communion may be traced to a use of the word 'church' not intended in God's Word.

In the passages at the head of this chapter, taken from St. Paul's writings and from the Revelation, we see the word used in two different ways, though, of course, there is a very close likeness between them. It is spoken of as the mystical Body of Christ. But it is used also to describe a small company of Christ's disciples in a city or region, as distinct and separate from the heathen around them, as 'the Church of Asia,' or a still smaller company of disciples who were wont to assemble as a family living in a house belonging to some one.

The Churches of Asia are, in the Book of Revelation, compared to candlesticks in the

vision of St. John, which candlesticks might be removed, or might so fall away as to be without the light which Christ is to His true Church, and in the midst of which He is represented as walking. In this latter sense our 19th Article uses the word thus: 'The visible Church of Christ is a body of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached and the sacraments be duly administered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.'

In what we may call the higher sense, we find it in our Prayer-book as the 'blessed company of all God's faithful people,' and in the collect for All Saints' Day it is spoken of as 'the elect knit together in one communion and fellowship in the mystical Body of Christ.'

Now, see how this view of the Church is contained in the passage from the Ephesians: 'Christ is the Head of the Church, the Saviour of the body.' The Church is 'subject unto Christ.' Christ 'loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word. He nourisheth it and cherisheth it even as a man his own flesh.' And all this that He may present it to Himself a 'glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing,

that it should be holy and without blemish.' All this can only be true of that universal company of all faithful people who are really united to Christ by a living faith, to whatever outward communion they may belong, and wherever they may be on earth or in heaven.

It is impossible to apply these or other like passages to any other than this invisible Body of Christ. As in the second chapter of the same Epistle, it is called the 'household of God, built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.'

We cannot rightly speak of any outward and visible body of professing Christians in these terms.

We could not thus speak of the Church of England, with all its disunited members; and we certainly could not so speak of the Church of Rome, with all its bad men as Popes, all its cruel persecutions, and all its false doctrines. On the contrary, we must hold with our 19th Article: 'As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria and Antioch have erred, so also the Church of Rome

hath erred, not only in their living and manner of ceremonies, but also in matters of Faith.'

This is the only Church of which Christ says, 'The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' Here alone is true unity to be found : one faith, one Spirit, one Lord.

It is 'the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.'

And all the mistakes of the Romish Church about unity and infallibility and the power of the keys have arisen from confounding this mystical Body of Christ, as seen with God's eyes, with any outward and visible professing community, as man sees a church. Such an outward corporate body has no promise of unity and infallibility. The Church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail, the Church in which the Holy Spirit continually abides and keeps in the truth, the Church of which it is said, 'The foundation standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His, and, Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity,' is this which the Apostle calls the Body of Christ, the Spouse of Christ, and which, when all its members on earth and in heaven are gathered in, will be presented 'without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish.'

It is this view which the Reformers all held who separated from the Church of Rome because it had fallen from the true faith. As Archbishop Cranmer writes: 'The Holy Church is so unknown to the world that no man can describe it, but God alone, who only searcheth the hearts of all men and knoweth His true children from others.' And again: 'This Church is the pillar of truth, because it resteth in God's Word.'

Leaving, then, the other Scriptural use of the word to the next chapter, let us ask ourselves, Are we sure that we are one of the living members of this body which is Christ? We are so nominally and by profession, by baptism and by the laying on of hands. But we all know these things may be without the real spiritual union which makes us one with Christ, 'of His flesh and of His bones.'

If the Apostle Paul were to appear among us, we know what would be his feelings about all the sad divisions and contentions among Christians. He would grieve as he did over those of his own day. He would urge lovingly that men should be of one mind, and that there be no divisions among us. He would surely again say to us, whatever some would say about Apostolical succession, 'Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith. Know ye not how that Jesus



Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?' He would still say, 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.' He would still say in all affection, 'Grace be with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;' while a brother Apostle would say, 'Try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.'

## XIV.

### CHURCH AND CHURCHES.

#### II.

‘Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours :

‘Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.’

*1 Corinthians i. 2, 3.*

IN Cruden’s Concordance there are some very good definitions of the word ‘Church,’ as it occurs in Scripture.

One is this: ‘All the elect of God of what nation soever, from the beginning to the end of the world, who make but one body whose head is Christ.’ This has been considered in the last address, and seems to be in accordance with the Apostle’s definition in his Epistle to the Ephesians, as well as in that to the Colossians (chap. i. 18), ‘Christ is the head of the body, the Church.’

Cruden also gives this description of the word

‘Church’: ‘A religious assembly selected and called out of the world by the doctrines of the Gospel to worship the true God in Christ, according to His Word.’ As in 1 Corinthians i. 2, ‘Unto the church of God which is at Corinth.’

It is in this sense that we speak of the Church of England, also of those of Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and of any of our colonies.

It should also apply to all Christian communities who hold the doctrines of the Gospel as embodied in our creeds. In this definition of ‘Church’ we do not unchurch any body of Christians who may differ from our own Church in matters of discipline, whose ‘rulers’ and ‘elders’ are selected and appointed under the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit, as in the days of the Apostles, by prayer and laying on of hands. We follow in St. Paul’s steps, who described the Church at Corinth as ‘sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours.’ And we add our prayers and wishes for them in his words, ‘Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.’

We have no right, and should have no wish, to monopolize the Gospel privileges and blessings

in their fullest measure, because we think in the Church of England our discipline and 'manner of communion' is more in accordance with Apostolic usage. 'Christ is both theirs and ours.'

How can it be right for the Church of Rome, or the Anglican Church, to thus consider they have the sole right to call themselves 'the Church,' and to suppose that other Churches are not equally serving God acceptably?

How can it be right not to use the word 'Churches' in the same sense in which it occurs twenty-two times in the Epistles of St. Paul, and many times in the Revelation of St. John?

Let us never confound two distinct things, the candlestick and the oil and light which it holds.

We have much to be thankful for in the community we call the Church of England. Her Creeds are her defences against erroneous teaching; and though not actually successful in keeping out false teachers, are, nevertheless, permanently existing safeguards against the Romish errors, if only men honestly abide by them. Her Creeds, her Articles, her Prayer-Book, and her Book of Homilies, if only taken in the natural sense intended by the Reformers, would keep up her character as a Protestant Church. The name of Protestant is one we should glory in. It was given to the Churches

of God at the time of the Reformation. It was given to those who protested against a certain decree issued by the Emperor Charles V., and the Diet of Spires, in 1529. It was, therefore, a protest against the claims of the Church of Rome over all Christians for their allegiance to her as the mistress of all other churches.

So long as there is error in the world we must protest against it, just as St. Paul did in his day against the many heresies of that period.

The religion of Protestant Churches is the religion of the Bible. It was the free circulation of the Scriptures, and the preaching of the Gospel in men's own tongues, that delivered men from the bondage and superstition of the dark ages.

It was as a Protestant Church that our 22nd Article was drawn up, which declares 'the Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping and Adoration, as well of Images as of Relics, and also invocation of Saints, is a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrants of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.'

And it is the glory of all Protestant Churches to maintain that 'we are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our

own works or deservings : Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.'

Of such a Church we rightly hold it has 'power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority in controversies of Faith ; and yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree anything against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce anything to be believed for necessity of Salvation.'

The Church of England differs from Rome in that it holds that ' Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation : so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.' (See Articles VI. and XX.)

But now, while we thus speak of our own Church as being sound in the faith, and of the Church of Rome as having erred concerning the faith, let us remember we are not passing judgment on any individuals who profess themselves

to be members of Christ's body. It is true that the Church of Rome teaches there is no salvation outside her pale, and counts all others heretics. Not so the Church of England. While we condemn false Churches as systems, we maintain there are many who belong to such communities who, in spite of what their Church teaches of error, may be true and faithful disciples of Christ, and, holding to Christ as their Head, are in a state of salvation. Many that are called Romanists are better Christians than many that are called members of a Protestant Church.

It will not be a question put to us at the last day, 'What was your Church?' but 'Are you in Christ Jesus?' 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.'

True membership to the true Church of which Christ is the Head is by such real union with Him as is implied in being baptized with the Holy Ghost, and abiding in Him as the branch in the Vine, and feeding on Him as the Bread of Life, and so being one with Him, that when He appears again, the Spirit which raised Him up, and which is dwelling in us, will quicken our mortal bodies, and He will claim us as belonging

to that 'great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, kindreds and people and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands.'



## XV.

### SIGNS AND WONDERS NECESSARY.

‘Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.’—*St. John* iv. 48.

‘If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.’—*St. Luke* xvi. 31.

‘Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?’—*Acts* xxvi. 8.

‘Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is anything too hard for Me?’—*Jeremiah* xxxii. 27.

‘The same works that I do bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me.’—*St. John* v. 36.

WHAT is a miracle? A miracle is a wonderful thing. And the most wonderful things are those which we cannot account for, because quite different from what we have ever seen done before. It is beyond the ordinary power of man to do the same.

The Bible is full of miracles. Explain them away and you take away the very essence of the Bible as a book of truth, a book written by inspiration of God's Spirit. If you cannot depend on what is there said about miracles, you cannot depend on any other of its statements.

You destroy the very foundations of a revelation from God. And 'if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?' Where is our hope? Where is there any knowledge of the one true God?

In the Old Testament and in the New miracles are recorded from the beginning to the end. And can we be surprised that it should be so, seeing that it is an account of God's dealings with man—the Creator of all things in heaven and earth with His creature, to whom He reveals Himself as Creator, asking for his allegiance and worship?

To deny the miracles of Scripture is the same as saying there is no God.

And why is it said in this same Book that it is only the fool who says in his heart, 'There is no God'?

Because it is the very height of absurdity and folly to say that the heavens and the earth came into existence and order and beauty without a Creator and a Designer. And because if the Great Designer and Creator did make these things, it is absurd and foolish to say He cannot alter them, or make them act in ways quite different from their ordinary course, or, in other words, work miracles.

Now this is the first great reason why we are

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called upon to believe in the signs and wonders recorded in Scripture.

God, the Creator and Governor of the world, wants to give proof to His creatures that He has revealed His will through those prophets and servants of His who either brought about the miracles, or bear witness to them. He knew from the beginning, 'Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.'

This accounts for the kind of miracles that are recorded in Scripture. Those things which God has made to act according to general laws which He has fixed for them, are at His bidding caused to act differently, and in the extraordinary way He orders them to do. God cannot be beneath the power of His own laws. His first acts of creation are miracles. His re-arrangement of His own works and creatures are likewise miracles.

Let us explain these by some instances. By a miracle at creation He divided the waters from the dry land. By the same power and will He brought water over the face of the earth to drown man.

By a miracle He gives the law to rivers to flow in their courses. By the same miraculous power He makes the water of a sea or river stand up in a heap on each

side, that His people may go across on dry land.

By a miracle He created the winds to blow hard or soft, and to make rough the sea on which they stir the waves. By the word of the same creative power He makes them obey Him, and causes a calm.

By a miracle He creates fire to answer purposes of consuming and warming. By a miracle He made a bush to be on fire and yet stays the ordinary action of fire, and the bush is not burnt; or His servants that are in it are made to live and breathe in the fierce element, and yet come out without even the smell of fire upon them.

By a miracle in the common course of nature, as we say, all things gravitate to the earth, and iron sinks in water; but if He chooses He lets His servant alter this, and make iron rise from the bottom, and float with the wood at the top.

By a miracle He causes a vine-tree to bear leaves and blossoms and grapes, turning the rain from heaven into fruit that may be turned into wine. But the same Almighty will was pleased once to quicken this process, and make six pots full of water become wine in a moment of time.

By a miracle He moulded the form of a man

out of the dust of the earth, and breathed into him, and made him a reasoning, reflecting being, after His own likeness.

By a like miracle He caused another to be born of a virgin, conceived in her womb by the Holy Ghost, so as to be a standing miracle—the God-man, Christ Jesus.

It is a miracle to combine the mind of man, with its marvellous faculties of thought, memory, and affection, with the equally marvellous frame which we call the body, with all its nerves, muscles, faculties and senses. It is another equally astounding miracle that after such bodies have crumbled to dust, that the time should come when the same mental powers should reappear in another body—a spiritual body, adapted to its higher life in a new and heavenly state of existence. But this is what we are told to believe and to hope for, on the ground that all preceding miracles are true, and especially the miraculous birth, resurrection, and ascension of the God-man, Jesus.

And so we might go on with all the signs and wonders related in Scripture. Men ask for signs to help to believe. Here they are. If they occurred every day for everyone's asking they would not be miracles to help their faith. They have been done at special times for special pur-

poses. All that is wanted is evidence that those who saw and believed at the time are worthy of our faith, also that they could not have been deceived in what they saw or what they have written.

Such evidence is forthcoming. If we believe the witness of man, the witness of God is greater. There is more evidence that the Scriptures are true than there is of any other old writings in the world. Men risk their lives, their fortunes, their affections, their happiness every day on a hundredth part of the evidence on which the writings of the Scriptures are proved to be truth.

No wonder men who doubt these things, and the existence of the God who does them, are called 'fools,' for it is far easier to believe there is a God, and that God speaks in the Scriptures and in created things, than it is to believe the only alternative, viz., that all the writers of the Old Testament and all the evangelists and apostles were a set of deluded men, or else were all impostors, who agreed together to tell lies, and that without any purpose for their own interest. Besides which, the very high standard of honesty, truthfulness and virtuous characters which are the result of this teaching as it influences mankind, is an un-

deniable proof they were neither deceiving others nor could themselves be deceived.

On the whole, then, do we not see that where men say they will not believe the Scriptures as a Revelation from God, and therefore as regards facts perfectly true, the fault is with them, in their hearts and not in their heads? They do not because they will not, else why should our Lord have said only a 'wicked' people ask for a sign—more signs than God has given them? 'For if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.'

What we all want is a teachable, childlike, humble spirit. Faith is the gift of God. We have to begin our search into truth by asking for the Spirit of Truth. 'The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.'

'Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein' (Hosea xiv. 9). 'If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.'

## XVI.

### SATAN AMONG SAINTS.

‘ Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.

‘ And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou ? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

‘ And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil ?

‘ Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought ?

‘ Hast not Thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side ? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.

‘ But put forth Thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face.

‘ And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power ; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.’

*Job i. 6-12.*

THE position in which we here find Satan is very mysterious. The sons of God are angels, messengers. They come and report themselves to God and receive orders for accomplishing His



will. Satan comes, too ; for orders also, it would seem.

We may well marvel at the position he occupies, at the company he joins, at the request he makes. But then we are reminded that all sin is a mystery. Great is the mystery of sin, in its beginning, in its workings, in its end, and in its author. Great also is the mystery of godliness. Who can say where heaven is ? where are those spiritual or 'heavenly places' spoken of in Ephesians (see chaps. i. and vi.) both as the place where Christ is, and where spiritual wickedness is. All these are mysterious because we cannot understand the nature of God Himself who filleth both heaven and earth, or the nature of evil spirits, fallen angels, some of whom are in chains of darkness, some of whom walk to and fro in the earth, and of whom it is here said the chief came into the presence of the Most High.

We shall understand all these mysteries hereafter, when we see them not as in a glass darkly, but with that spiritual eyesight of which it is said, 'we shall see face to face, and know as we are known.' Meantime here are facts we have to deal with. We cannot wait till we understand them. Mysterious as sin is, it is in us and around us. Its author is still among us, still the accuser and tempter of man, as he was of

Job. It behoves us to be on our guard, not ignorant of his devices.

We are taught here that the Evil One can be in the company of the saints. If so in heaven, much more on earth. He goes to and fro considering what evil he can inflict on the sons of men, especially God's children. St. Peter wrote feelingly when he said, 'Your adversary goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.' As with Job, so with Peter, he had considered God's servant, and desired to have him. Not even our Lord Himself in the days of His flesh was exempt from the special designs and assaults of this enemy of God and man.

He watches his opportunities. He seems to study character, and to look for the weak points in our natures. So was his first great design when man was first placed on the earth. He considered Adam and Eve; she was the weakest side of human nature. Her desire to be more wise, to satisfy her appetite with luscious fruit, these were the weak points, the openings in the armour of human nature through which his darts would find entrance. He knew David's weak points when he brought strong temptation to bear on him. He considered Job's case thoroughly. He charged him with serving God only for the good things he got for it. He reasoned that if only

he lost all, and suffered fearfully in the flesh, he would curse God and cease to be His servant.

True, he was mistaken as to the effects his temptations would produce. In all this Job never charged God foolishly. Not even when the trial came through his wife, whose evil advice was 'curse God and die'; but he maintained the integrity of his trust in God to the end.

None of us, then, can expect to be left alone by this fearful prince of darkness. To none of us, except our Lord, who fought and overcame for us, does he come and find nothing. In every one of God's most faithful servants does he find some grounds for hoping to injure, even where, as with Job and Peter, he knows he cannot entirely succeed. So says the latter to us all, 'Be sober, be vigilant . . . resist stedfast in the faith.'

In these days, when some doubt all the great truths of Revelation, there are those who deny the very existence and nature of this evil Being. They think of him as a quality, a thing, not, as here represented, a Person, a spirit, an intellectual Being. Not flesh and blood, indeed, but, worse for us, an unseen spiritual wicked One in High places as well as among us on earth. No place too sacred for his presence, no company

too holy, no heart too devoted, no service too sacred, but what Satan may possibly present himself to snatch away the Word producing good impressions, to mix evil thoughts with good, to mar and spoil God's works.

There is comfort here in the thought: His power is not almighty. It is limited. Thus far and no further God lets him go. 'He is in Thy hands, but touch not his life.' The Lord Jesus is on His faithful servant's side. 'Touch not Mine anointed. I have prayed for them.' Satan, like Joseph's brethren, 'means evil,' but God overrules for good. They come forth like purified precious metal. They learn to abhor self, to repent, to renounce self-righteousness, to look unto Jesus and say, 'In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.' 'If God be for us, who can be against us? He will keep the feet of His saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness. He will bruise Satan under our feet.'

## XVII.

### SIN WHICH HAS NO FORGIVENESS.

‘I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men : but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

‘And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him : but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.’

*St. Matthew xii. 31, 32.*

I HAVE not unfrequently, in the course of a long ministry, met with people who were afraid lest they should have committed, or would commit, the sin against the Holy Ghost—the sin for which there is no forgiveness.

It is, indeed, a fear that should enter the mind of everyone whose conscience is making him afraid he is not living in a way he ought.

It becomes very necessary to have a right understanding what this sin is, and how we may be quite sure, with God’s help, to be quite clear of it.

The passage before us shows how our Lord

meant that some in His days were in danger of incurring this very sin.

Our Lord, then, gave the warning to some because they said, 'He hath an unclean spirit.'

You observe how it was the Scribes went so near committing this sin. It was by regarding the work of the Holy Ghost in Christ as the work of the evil spirit.

Jesus, 'full of the Holy Ghost,' was casting out devils by the finger of God. The Scribes spoke blasphemy against Christ in saying He was in league with the devil. Should they continue of this mind, and, when the Holy Ghost should come down and appeal to them through the preaching of the Apostles, they still should ascribe this to the evil spirit, they would indeed be in danger of eternal judgment. For how could they escape the damnation of hell who thus rejected the offers of salvation through the one only Mediator, and resisted the one holy influence by which they could be changed in heart and life?

You see, therefore, there could be no forgiveness because there could be no repentance towards God, and no application of that one only Name by which there is remission of sins.

The sin was unpardonable because there was no repentance—no repentance because no

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Holy Spirit. But sorrow for sin, godly sorrow, is the work of the Spirit ; where there is this, there is no fear of having committed sin against the Holy Ghost.

We may see this in another place in Scripture. In the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews it is said, ‘ It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance ; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God : but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing ; whose end is to be burned.’

Here you see is not, in the first place, the impossibility of forgiveness, but of repentance, and the reason is very evident. It supposes the case of persons to whom the Gospel has come with a certain amount of power. The Spirit of God has impressed their minds, enlightening them, and giving them a taste of God’s good Word, and a hope of heaven.

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They may even have been teachers of good things, and used the Name of Christ for casting out devils and doing great works. Then, if such depart from the faith, fall away from Christ, how will it be possible to bring them back to real repentance, and true faith and love, seeing they are resisting that Spirit who alone can work these feelings in them, and refusing that gracious Saviour's sacrifice, by which alone sin can be taken away?

Just as the rain and sunshine on the earth are either producing good fruit and flowers, or else weeds and worthless, poisonous plants, so all the gracious influence brought to bear on men's minds by the Word and Spirit is either producing fruits of righteousness, which increase and abound to God's glory and the good of men, or else, being all in vain, it is hardening and making them unprofitable. In such cases, what can possibly work good in men's hearts if this one great means has been tried in vain?

Thus you see sin against the Holy Ghost is not a single act or word, but a state of heart which resists the appeals which come from Christ and from the Spirit of Truth; and, as our Lord tells us, if such find no pardon here, they cannot find it in the world to come. We are not told of any pains of purgatory which



can effect a change which God's lovingkindness and His Holy Spirit have failed to produce.

We may well be afraid lest we should be thus guilty. But if sincere in our wishes to avoid it, if there is a wholesome fear and dread of such desertion by this heavenly visitor to our hearts, then are we in no fear of committing the sin that is unpardonable. We are dealing with a God who is love, and who is ready to pardon.

Take care that your sincerity be proved by receiving and acting on the warning: 'See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.' Receive not the grace of God in vain. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings, *i.e.*, appeals from God's servants. Grieve not the Holy Spirit. Let the Word of God not meet your ears only, but strike home to your heart; and not that only, but dwell richly within you.

Read often and dwell upon the teachings of that Holy Book which is the voice of God's Spirit which inspired it. Ask for the Holy Spirit of adoption, whereby God is prayed to as a loving Father; and thus led by the Spirit you will be safe—'spiritually minded,' which is 'life and peace.'

This sin, like all sin, must be checked in the first beginnings in the heart. And a very good prayer can be made on the subject from David's

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petitions at the close of the 19th Psalm, where he refers to 'secret sins,' which, if not checked, lead to 'presumptuous or wilful sins,' and these lead on to the 'great transgression,' which we may suppose the Lord alludes to as unpardonable, and St. John refers to when he says: 'There is a sin unto death; I do not say he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not unto death.'

'Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults. Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.'

## XVIII.

### MYSTERY OF GODLINESS.

‘And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.’—  
I *Timothy* iii. 16.

‘Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.’—I *Corinthians* xv. 51.

MYSTERY is a Greek word, and means secret. It is used in several ways in the New Testament. It is well to inquire into the uses to which the word is applied, the chief of which we have just read.

There are two classes of mystery. Some are secrets which were kept secret for a long time, but are now made clear; and some remain mysteries, and will remain beyond our understanding as long as we see only with the eye of faith.

Of the first kind our Lord spoke when He said, ‘Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom’; and St. Paul calls the Gospel and preaching of Jesus Christ a ‘mystery which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, according to the command-

ment of God, and made known to all nations for the obedience of faith' (Rom. xvi.).

St. Paul also uses the word 'mystery' in this sense when he says, 'We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God' (1 Cor. ii.).

Then, again, it was a mystery that the Israelite of old could not understand that the Gentiles should be partakers of the promises in Christ by the Gospel.

On this the Apostle dwells much in the Epistle to the Ephesians, and says that he writes that when 'they read they might understand his knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, but is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;' and further says that 'grace was given him that he should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of

Christ, to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ' (Ephes. iii.).

That which seems so plain to us, that the Gentiles and all the world should have the Gospel preached to them, was once a great mystery to those who considered these blessings were the peculiar property of the descendants of Abraham after the flesh.

These, then, are mysteries or secrets once hidden, now revealed.

But mysteries remain ; mysteries of which the facts are announced, but the nature of the facts is beyond our full comprehension, and we have to take them on trust and to believe them, however mysterious, because 'thus saith the Lord.'

The incarnation of Christ is a great mystery—'God manifest in the flesh.' That the Son of God should become the Son of Man by being conceived in the womb of Mary by the Holy Ghost, this is one of the very greatest of all mysteries. But the fact is 'without controversy,' without the least doubt revealed in the Gospel. God was in Christ, so that in Him dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily ; so that He should say, 'I and the Father are one,' and 'he that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father.'

Another mystery is the spiritual union between Christ and His Church. He the Head, we the body. 'We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. . . . This is a great mystery . . . Christ and the Church' (Ephes. v.).

But of this mystery we should have experience. We are one with Christ through a living faith, and by the indwelling of His Spirit. 'As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.' So close and real is the union, it is compared to the vine and the living branches, yea, even to the union which exists between the food which by digestion becomes part of us.

Faith in Christ puts us at once into the relation of children to God, justified and in no condemnation. And because sons, He sends the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, so that we have the title to the inheritance by the merits of our Ransomer, and the witness and earnest and pledge of the inheritance by His Spirit which He gives us. Oh wonderful mystery, beyond us to comprehend, but ours to know, to feel, to rejoice in! We know by experience the mysterious connection between our souls and our bodies, so also should we know the connection between Christ and ourselves. For us to live is

Christ. His Spirit moves us, His word dwells in us. His power against evil is a reality; His love constraining us is a motive we are conscious of, though not in the degree we could wish at all times. All is mystery, but all is blessed truth, blessed experience according to our measure of faith.

Connected inseparably with this is another mystery, equally to be some day our happy experience. 'Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.'

Different from all other mysteries this will be to us if we are real living members of Christ. We know it prospectively by faith in the Revelation of God. He promises to come again, and as flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, we must be changed and fitted for that kingdom. He will therefore change our vile body, and fashion it like to His glorious body; and we shall know it is a reality by finding ourselves thus clothed upon with spiritual bodies like angels, like Christ. But all so quickly done, as quick as you move your eyelid. The trumpet awakening the dead, the voice of Christ meeting

our ears, and the finding ourselves caught up with saints and angels into the very presence of Christ, and so to be for ever with the Lord. Glorious indeed will this mystery be. No longer mystery when we realize a glorified body, a glorious mansion, glorious company, and all gloriously joyful, because all other mysteries solved and explained ; when God Himself and the Lamb shall be the light which banishes all darkness, reveals all mysteries, and God Himself wipes from our eyes not only all scales of ignorance and doubt, but all tears from sorrow and from sin.



## XIX.

### MYSTERY OF INIQUITY.

‘For the mystery of iniquity doth already work : only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

‘Then shall that Wicked One be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming :

‘Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

‘And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish ; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

‘For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie :

‘That they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.’

*2 Thessalonians ii. 7-12.*

As there is a mystery of godliness, so there is a mystery of iniquity.

Of this the Apostle speaks here as already working, but seems to say there is to be a more mysterious exercise of its power before final destruction by Christ.

Some thought in his days the day of Christ was already come. He writes to say, not so, nor

will it come till the day of evil be more fully come, and ripe for the destroying power of Christ in His day. So he foretells a 'falling away first,' which must be from Christ and His Church. Then a 'Man of Sin,' a lawless one, is to be revealed, which is an anti-Christian power in opposition to Christ.

He says also this power will be exercised under Satan with miracles and lying wonders, and deceivableness and strong delusion. Then comes his destruction by the Spirit of the Lord's mouth, and the brightness of His coming.

Here, then, is mystery in iniquity. It concerns us all, for it is already at work; and as St. John says, 'Ye have heard that antichrist shall come; even now are there many antichrists, whereby we know it is the last time.'

It concerns us, for one chief feature in the mystery is that it deceives and deludes people, just as the serpent did at first.

No one can reflect very deeply on the nature of sin, its beginning, its continuance, its effects in the world, without feeling a difficulty in reconciling all this with the idea of an all-powerful and all-merciful God. The thought will arise, Why does He permit this evil power to mar and spoil His own fair creation, to bring suffering and misery, pain and death, into the

world? And not only so, but to bring some worse things yet to come, both in this world and also on those whom the devil shall claim as his victims in the world to come.

This is a mystery ; one of those secrets which God holds in His own bosom, and we cannot know it all till we see light in God's light in the world to come.

But because it is a mystery there is no reason for refusing to look it in the face, and consider how it bears on us, how we may escape the evil it threatens.

If we are attacked with a mysterious malady, we all the more quickly and eagerly fly to skilled doctors who can at any rate tell us how to get a remedy, even though they cannot explain fully the character of the disease. We do not say, 'It is so mysterious, I will let it alone.'

The mysterious working of sin is the painful experience of us all. We see it working ruin in thousands around us. We feel it acting on our souls and affecting our happiness.

The Word of God which tells us sin is a mystery, tells us also of a counteracting mystery which is a cure for the evils of the first: the mystery of godliness.

The serpents' bites were mysteries to the Israelites dying in the wilderness ; but they

were cured by believing in as great a mystery—the healing power of a brass serpent lifted up before their eyes.

If it was mystery that the serpent should enter Paradise and deceive the woman, it is still greater mystery that his power to deceive will be even more exercised in the very last days than it has all these thousands of years. His malice and hatred of God and man is mysterious. And these will be seen more when he is permitted to bring to a head the great temptation which is to come on all the world to try them. When we should have thought the Gospel should have become a blessing to the whole world, we are told instead there is to be a great falling away, evil men becoming worse, deceived and deceiving; and this some day to develop still further in the manifestation of the Evil One in some earthly, kingly power, to which all the world bows in adoration.

This is enlarged upon in figurative language in the Book of Revelation. It is said to be the result of a contest between Michael and his angels, and the dragon and his angels. And the 'great dragon, that old serpent called the Devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world,' is said to be cast out of heaven into the earth, and his angels with him. And so, though

this betokens the time for victory for the brethren of Christ the victor, yet it is first of all terrible for the world ; so we read : “ Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea ! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time ’ (Revelation xii.).

But yet another figure appears to foretell even a greater mystery, so that St. John says : ‘ When I saw her, I wondered with great wonder ’ (admiration). ‘ And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou wonder ? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast ’ (kingly power) ‘ which carrieth her.’

Thus we have two great powers of evil, and though the mystery remains in many respects a mystery till fulfilled, we are told enough to see that these are the manifestations of the devil by which he makes war against Christ and His saints. That there are to be two great powers, a world power and a religious power ; the one compared to a beast with ten horns, the other compared to a woman, a harlot, and ‘ a great city on many waters,’ which are ‘ peopled by multitudes, nations, and tongues ;’ that by these men are deceived, and as a harlot draws away affections in a wrong direction, so men are seduced from the worship of the true God.

That the woman is represented as 'MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH, drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.'

So is the mystery very great and increasingly great and wonderful.

But we see for the present enough to put us on our guard, to show us the nature of the future workings of sin and the aim of the devil, and above all, to show us how earnestly we should pray that we may escape all these evils that are coming upon the world, and be counted worthy to stand before the Son of Man, and not be deceived and fall away.

Turn we then again to the counteracting great mystery—the mystery of God manifest in the flesh. Christ is the true kingly power to whom we owe allegiance, and to whom every knee shall one day bow in heaven and earth. True allegiance to Him will prevent our being under the influence of the evil powers of this world; He will hold our affections too strongly. The false Church powers, with all their meretricious adornings and attractions, will not avail to seduce us from real spiritual worship, and we shall be kept among the elect whom it is not possible to deceive. We shall be of those of

whom the Apostle speaks, ' But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth : whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ ' (2 Thess. ii.) ; and of those of whom St. John bore witness, ' They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony : and they loved not their lives unto death ' (Revelations xii.).

## XX.

### CHRIST'S RELATIONS.

‘ While He yet talked to the people, behold, His mother and His brethren stood without, desiring to speak with Him.

\* ‘ Then one said unto Him, Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with Thee.

‘ But He answered and said unto him that told Him, Who is My mother? and who are My brethren?

‘ And He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, Behold My mother and My brethren!

‘ For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother.’

*St. Matthew xii. 46-50.*

THIS passage should be taken in connection with one of similar import in St. Luke's Gospel, chap. xi., where we are told of a certain woman among Christ's hearers who ‘ lifted up her voice and said unto Him, Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it.’

The two passages taken together teach us very important lessons, and throw a great deal of light on the views we should take with regard



to the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus. We get from these passages a correction to the wrong views persons have held and do hold on this subject. And we also gather a very blessed lesson from our Lord's mouth as to the way in which He looks on His disciples as near and dear relations.

It is a well-known and most sad fact, that from the teachings of the Romish Church the Virgin Mary is prayed to by thousands, wherever that form of religion prevails. She is called upon as the 'Mother of God' to help sinners, and to intercede with her Son in their behalf. No one denies that this is the case, though more of it prevails in foreign lands than among the Roman Catholics in England.

Now does it not seem certain that our Lord foresaw that this would be the case when He gave utterance to the words before us? He anticipated the errors that would prevail by thus meeting them. And it is an undoubted fact that there is not a single false doctrine that has ever been held and taught by false teachers, but what it can be shown to be false by a careful examination of Scripture.

Now in the passage before us in St. Luke, it is very evident that in the remark made by a woman in the company, about the blessedness

of her who gave birth to Jesus, we see the first tiny seed of that error, only at first a mistaken idea, but which has since grown to such an excess of error in the Church of Rome. It was so very natural for any mother, contemplating the extraordinary excellency of that Man whose teaching they were listening to, to wish, indeed, she had been the mother of such a son, and to consider His mother a most happy woman. 'Blessed is the womb that bare Thee.' Did not our Lord feel that Himself? Did He not indeed love that mother? Was it not of His own Spirit that the words of the song foretold, 'All generations shall call Me blessed'? Yes, indeed. And He could not have wished that His hearers should think He undervalued His mother's privileges. But He foresaw a tendency in mankind to overrate the blessedness, and to think that His mother stood in respect of spiritual advantages on higher grounds than those who were His beloved disciples, and were brought into that relation by hearing and keeping His Word.

So, too, the same thing was taught in the other incident. His mother and His brethren wanted on this occasion to get near to Him. Probably something important, in their eyes, had happened, which they wanted to speak to

Him about. Naturally, bystanders thought, 'We must make way for these relations. They are without, waiting; tell the Master. He will like to see and have them come into His near presence.' And no doubt He would so feel. But Jesus foresaw the hidden error which one day would become a plague-spot in the religion of Christendom, and so He stretched forth His hand over all His faithful disciples and said, 'Behold My mother and My brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother.'

Let us, then, prize this blessed relationship. Let us see that it is truly our own. Behold, what manner of love is here! That we should be permitted to say, 'Jesus is my brother. He regards me as one of His near relations.' This love is indeed very wonderful. Yet it is mine to say, 'My Beloved is mine, and I am His.'

To have been related to Jesus after the flesh would have been counted an honour. But as a hearer of His Word, a doer of His Father's will, I have as great an honour, for to me He gives power to become a son of God, a brother of Jesus, and to say of God, 'My God, my Father,' as He did.

For very good reasons, very little indeed is

recorded in the New Testament concerning the Virgin Mary. Mentioned once in the Acts of the Apostles, not at all in the Epistles, we see the reason why. On the other hand, such honour have all His saints. He loves them with an everlasting love. He died for them; lives to make intercession for them; is preparing a home for them, and will soon come again and take them home, that where He is, there they may be also. His last act to His mother on earth was to provide a new home for her, when He bid His beloved disciple henceforth to shelter her. But He is gone to prepare a more abiding home in glory, where all His family are to meet together, and to dwell together in the blessed mansions from which none shall ever wander. 'Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.'

## XXI.

### NO HOLINESS, NO HEAVEN.

‘Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.’—*Hebrews* xii. 14.

‘As He which calleth you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. Because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy.’—*1 Peter* i. 15, 16.

‘Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.’—*2 Corinthians* vii. 1.

IF one thing more than another is plain in Scripture about heaven and its inhabitants, it is this, that it is a holy place and only for holy people. All through the Bible this is the main thought we find in it—that which I have put at the head of this chapter—that ‘without holiness no man shall see the Lord.’

God is a holy God, and He tells us in unmistakable language His people must be holy. From the beginning to the end of the Old Testament and New Testament this is the language of God: ‘Be ye holy, for I am holy.’ Everyone knows this, but how few live as if they really believed it! You will find many who say they

expect to get to heaven because God is merciful, but not many who are well assured that they are qualified to live and be happy in heaven just because they are holy, although it is plainly said, 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' And although it is written over heaven's portals, 'No admission without holiness,' yet do many reckon somehow on entering heaven because God forgives them for Christ's sake, without asking how far they have the absolutely indispensable qualification of being like Christ in righteousness and holiness.

Christ did not only die for our justification, but He also lives to impart unto His followers those gifts of the Holy Spirit which will conform them to His image and likeness.

One single attribute of God is not enough to be the ground of hope of heaven. He is merciful. That is most true, or we had no means of drawing near to Him now or hereafter. He would be to us a consuming fire, because of our sinfulness. But He is also just and true to keep His word, and that word is, as given in different ways by His servants: 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.'

'Who,' says David, 'shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in His holy place?' And the answer, you will see, is, 'He that hath

clean hands and a pure heart.' Over and over again we are taught, 'there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth.' We can see the reason at once for keeping out all that shall be found without holiness. It would be no happiness for the unholy to be eternally in the presence of a holy God, holy angels, holy persons. One unholy person in there would defile the whole society, and mar the happiness of all.

But, indeed, why hath God revealed Himself as a Holy Being, His Son the Holy One, His Spirit the Holy Spirit, but that we may be partakers of the Divine nature after escaping the corruption of the world and of the flesh.

Only one way is put before us of being holy, and that way is, in one word, Christ, the Holy One. 'In Christ' we are holy—holy, first of all, in the sense of being dedicated, consecrated to His service.

In all God's appointments for His worship on earth you see this one thing taught—God's presence is holy. When He appeared to Moses in the burning bush, it was said, 'Take off thy shoes, for the ground is holy.' When God's presence was to be found on earth in the tabernacle or temple, it was in the 'Holy of Holies.' When the priest would enter for the people, a band on his forehead was 'Holiness unto the Lord.' Nor

could he enter without making first an offering by blood to sanctify him, and all the vessels and utensils for the service of God were thus dedicated, counted holy. So Jesus, our High Priest, is gone into the presence of God after offering His own blood, and 'by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.' This is the first step in holiness—accepted in the Beloved, justified by His blood.

And the next step in following after holiness is ever to be abiding in Christ, receiving of His Spirit, and so bringing forth fruits of the Spirit which constitute holiness of life and character.

If God wills His people to be holy, we are sure He gives the means for becoming holy, and for keeping holy. These are manifold. A holy day is given for this end. Use the Sunday aright, and holy thoughts, holy desires, holy words will result.

A holy place is given to us. Where two or three meet together in His Name, His holy presence sanctifies the worshippers, and we are on holy ground.

A holy feast is given us. Bread and wine, blessed and partaken of with believing and thankful hearts, keep up a holy remembrance of His love, and the souls of the faithful are fed and nourished.



Afflictions are sent for holy ends. He chastens us 'that we may be partakers of His holiness.' And if exercised thereby, the peaceable fruits of righteousness appear in our lives. Humility and patience and tenderness of spirit towards others, and other such like holy fruits, are wrought in us.

Then, by no means last, the Holy Scriptures, written by holy men of old, are God's special channels for sanctifying His people and conforming them to His holy will. So prayed our Lord: 'Sanctify them by Thy truth. Thy Word is truth.'

Thus our Father means us always to be 'perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.' Absolute perfection is not attainable to flesh and blood. But there is a measure attainable for each according to the measure of faith He gives us, and the unction from the Holy One, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, causing us to grow in grace and in knowledge of Christ, will secure this happy end, which the Apostle sought for the Christians of his day when he thus wrote: 'The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it' (1 Thess. v.).

## XXII.

### JESUS IN THE FAMILY.

‘ Now it came to pass, as they went, that He entered into a certain village : and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house.

‘ And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word.

‘ But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to Him, and said, Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone ? bid her therefore that she help me.

‘ And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things :

‘ But one thing is needful : and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.’

*St. Luke x. 38-42.*

IT is pleasant and profitable to think of Jesus as the guest of His people, a visitor to His friends’ houses when on earth. He always so spoke on those occasions as to leave some of His words and actions to be left on record for our advantage.

So it was when the guest of Zaccheus, the guest of Simon the Pharisee, the guest invited to a wedding, and the guest, as here before us, in the home of Martha and Mary.

These two sisters were probably in some points different in disposition and character, and the Lord spoke differently of each. But in one thing they were alike. They loved their Lord and Master, who honoured them with His presence. The difference in them was brought out here in what they did with the opportunity they had of being in company with the Lord.

Diversity in disposition and character will always be apparent in members of a family. But it is a blessed thing when all are agreed in this one thing, a wish to honour Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Sometimes, as here, the younger may excel in the degree of grace that adorns the character. It is well if, when that is the case, there is no jealous feeling or envy between them. Martha complained that Mary did not help her in entertaining their guest. She asked Him if He did not feel with her. Would He not bid her to come, as perhaps her custom was, and help her in household duties? This desire was natural. It was but a true picture of home life. Here was a rare opportunity, a very royal guest, worthy of the best the house could give Him. Here was the elder one slaving away, all anxiety lest the food should not be as it should be and all things served properly. Martha's thoughts were all

absorbed in this direction. Why was Mary sitting apart, talking with the great guest, instead of taking her share in the needful work of the moment? Surely, she thought, He will see her lack of duty and reprove her.

Was she surprised to find just the opposite? Jesus took Mary's part, and even blamed Martha. The reproof she asked for her sister came as a home-thrust to herself. Gentle, quiet, loving, but needed. 'Faithful are the wounds of a friend. He that rebuketh a person afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with his lips.'

It cost Jesus something to rebuke the zealous care which love prompted for His own benefit. But as it was needed to instruct both Martha then and us now, He said, 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.'

Mary knew and valued her opportunity. She had much to ask, much to learn. Time was precious. The Teacher would soon be gone on His way. And she was as absorbed in satisfying her spiritual appetite as her sister was in spreading the table for her Lord. Martha did what was needful to be done. Her fault was in not

allowing her sister to follow after the good part she had chosen. Her fault was, too, that the good part of feeding her soul on the bread of life was not as yet the highest object of her life. She saw Jesus as a Prophet; yea, believed He was 'the Son of God that should come into the world.' But yet her mind was more bent on the material passing honour she could do Him than on the great spiritual truths that lay before her. Jesus knew this, and the impression left on her mind would be confirmed deeply afterwards, when He was gone up to where He was before, and all the plan of salvation was clear to her mind. She would see why Mary loved the good part that was spiritual, and herself would doubtless learn to value and choose it beyond all others.

There are more Marthas in the world than Marys. Anxious care sits on the brow of many a householder, just making them more careful and troubled about temporal things than about spiritual and eternal, for 'the things which are not seen are eternal.'

Many also are too much occupied in caring for the external rites and ceremonies of religion, thinking and meaning thereby to do Him honour, not enough considering that the one thing above all others is spiritual worship, and that

that only will never be taken from us which we hold by reason of our vital union with the unseen but ever-living Saviour. To sit at the feet of Jesus, hearing His words and speaking to Him in prayer, this is the best corrective to over-much anxiety about this world, which so soon will pass away from us.

Are you, O reader, conscious of the value of the opportunity you have of sitting at the feet of Jesus as a learner of heavenly truth, and getting your soul enriched with that good part which can never be taken away?

Do you, amidst all earthly business and cares, try each day to sit, Bible in hand, asking to be taught more and more about the one thing needful?

We must not be 'slothful in business,' but we must be also 'fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.'

The one thing needful is the love of Christ. When all earthly things are passing away, when our friends are leaving us, when our earthly tabernacles are dissolving, this will be our sure footing, our solid and enduring comfort. Nothing can separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus my Lord.

## XXIII.

### ELECT ACCORDING TO FORE- KNOWLEDGE.

‘ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus :

‘ According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love :

‘ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

‘ To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved.’

*Ephesians i. 3-6.*

GOD’S electing love is here plainly declared. Some people are afraid of the doctrine of election. They think it tends to antinomianism, *i.e.*, to making people live without law to God because they feel they are elected. This is certainly a very wrong state to be in. It is an abuse of the doctrine, and not a right use of it. But an abuse does not prove a doctrine to be wrong. The question is, what is the Scripture

doctrine of election, and then what use are we to make of it ?

There is no doctrine in God's Word which is not liable to abuse. They are small-minded persons who turn away from a doctrine and have a horror of it because they have only heard of it as abused.

No reader of God's Word doubts there is such a doctrine in some sense or other. And no member of the Church of England can deny it is one of its doctrines. It is so set forth in the 17th of the Thirty-nine Articles. Before we turn to this let us ask, 'What saith the Scriptures ? How readest thou ?'

Let us see a few passages where the doctrine is stated, and then ask why it is stated, and what is its proper use ?

The words are plain enough : ' Chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world.' ' Predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace ' (Ephes. i.). So in the Epistle to the Romans, chap. viii., saints are called according to His purpose, called because predestinated, then justified, then glorified. St. Peter held the doctrine, for he addresses Christians as ' elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.'



140 *Elect according to Foreknowledge.*

St. Paul speaks of election on the part of God beginning before the persons so elected were born, when in Romans ix. he writes : ' For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.'

It is impossible to deny that ' known unto God are all His works from the beginning,' or that He foreknows and foresees who among all mankind shall become true believers and obedient to His will. Nor can it be denied that those who do thus conform to His will do so (as they themselves admit) because He of His good pleasure worketh in their hearts to will and to do. This is the doctrine of election. How can anyone in the face of this deny the doctrine ?

But did our Lord hold it and teach it? Undoubtedly, and thereby incurred the great anger of many of His hearers. ' All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me. Ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep. As I said unto you, My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life ; and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of My hand.'

*Elect according to Foreknowledge.* 141

In St. Matthew xxiv. He makes mention of His elect thus: The days of tribulation are shortened 'for the elect's sake'; that there will be signs and wonders by which, 'if it were possible, the very elect would be deceived'; that his 'angels will be sent to gather together His elect from the four winds of heaven.'

The illustration used by Prophets and Apostles is that of the potter's power over lumps of clay to mould them according to his will. It is 'God that worketh in us to will and to do of His good pleasure.'

That the doctrine has been greatly abused and is abused is undeniable. What, then, is the right and Scriptural and profitable way of using it?

Observe, then, that it is brought forward by St. Paul to prove that the Jewish dispensation was no failure, for though as a nation they were cast off for unbelief, there was a remnant who did believe, a 'remnant according to election of grace.' God foresaw the many who would not believe, God foreknew the few who would believe; and these did so because by God's grace their calling was made effectual. He had mercy on whom He would have mercy. What looked like a failure in God's work and word was only so as man saw it, not, therefore, 'as though the Word of God had taken none

142 *Elect according to Foreknowledge.*

effect.' St. Paul himself was an instance. He says God had selected him from his mother's womb for the work for which He qualified him by His grace.

Election is also to prove there is no boasting on the part of man. It is of grace, that no flesh should glory in His presence. It is to humble us. We cannot but feel if God had not chosen us in Christ, we should never have chosen Him. As Jesus said, 'Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.' It is to strengthen our love to Him for His unmerited mercy, in that while we were enemies and opposed to Him, His free love was fixed on us, an everlasting love.

Lastly, ever remember that all whom God elects He elects unto holiness, and His purposes are carried out through the offers of His Holy Spirit, which it is within our power to reject. We cannot say, 'I am elect because I can read the secret counsels of God.' We can read our election through the offers of God's grace and mercy open to all, and by the witness of the Spirit within us.

'He hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.' And so, again, by what means His purposes are carried out St. Peter explains: 'Elect according to the

foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.'

Thus, as our Article says, a 'godly consideration of our election is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of God.' That the ungodly consideration of this doctrine may make some say, 'If I am elect, I shall be saved; if I am not elect, it is no use my trying to be,' is a wresting of Scripture to their own destruction. They do not act like this in the ordinary affairs of life, in the choice of good or escape from evil. They do not say, 'It is so fated, so I will not ask at all.' God knows what they will do. But they act independently of His will, aiming at the good, fleeing from the evil.

So as regards the evil of sin and the blessings of grace and life. It is as sinners we claim mercy at the hands of our Saviour, and it is because the promises are made to sinners and to whosoever will come and repent and believe that we can read our title to mercy and to glory. And thus, fleeing to the appointed refuge and asking for His grace, we learn to love Him who first loved us, and chose us in Christ from the foundation of the world.

## XXIV.

### MARVELLOUS FAITH.

‘ And a certain centurion’s servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.

‘ And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto Him the elders of the Jews, beseeching Him that He would come and heal his servant.

‘ And when they came to Jesus, they besought Him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom He should do this :

‘ For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

‘ Then Jesus went with them. And when He was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not Thyself : for I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof :

‘ Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto Thee : but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.

‘ For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth ; and to another, Come, and he cometh ; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

‘ When Jesus heard these things, He marvelled at him, and turned Him about, and said unto the people that followed Him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

‘ And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.’

*St. Luke vii. 2-10.*

IF Jesus marvelled at this man’s faith, it is well while for us to look into it and try and

see what was wonderful about it, and so learn something about our own faith.

It was found 'not in Israel,' not in those so highly favoured as to be within the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants, not in those who had Moses and the prophets to teach them about Christ, not in those 'whose were the oracles, and of whom concerning the flesh Christ came,' but in a Gentile, a Roman soldier.

Not for the first time did Jesus find more favour and more faith in Himself as a Saviour among those who were outside the pale of the Jewish Church, as were Samaritans, Greeks, and Romans. So the woman of Samaria, the grateful leper, the Syrophenician woman, and the centurion are among such cases, showing that outward Church privileges are not always effective, and that God's 'free Spirit' is not tied to forms and means, however good and useful.

This centurion had a sick servant. His life and services he valued, and it made him anxious when he was ill. A good master cares much for a good servant, and considers him as he would a member of his family. His faith in Christ made him see the certainty of a cure if Jesus should only be applied to. He knew this

simply because he believed all that he had heard of the works and the character of Jesus. He knew He had the power, he knew He had the will. So he sent 'elders of the Jews, beseeching Him that He would come and heal him.' This of itself was no ordinary belief. For many around him doubted both the power and the will of Jesus.

But this man's faith was still more remarkably shown. First in the deep sense of his own unworthiness in the presence of so great a personage, and then in the powerful argument he used for being satisfied with only a word from Jesus. 'I thought not myself worthy to come unto Thee . . . I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof; but say in a word, and my servant will be healed.'

These views of Christ all point to the fact that this man's marvellous faith had discovered in Christ the power of God, the love of God, the very attributes of God; and while some saw only in Him the son of the carpenter, others a great prophet, this man saw in Him the Omniscience and Omnipotence that belong to the Godhead. It was this that made him sensible of his own unworthiness. The same causes produced the same effect in Peter, who, when He saw the wondrous power that brought fish into his net

from obedience to the will of Jesus, was for separation : 'Depart from me, O Lord ; I am a sinful man.' The same feeling you find in Isaiah, who, seeing the glory of the Lord in the temple, cried, 'Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips.'

It is this deeply humble feeling that will affect all our prayers and all our approaches to God. 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' the first and the last prayer of every child of God. Not worthy to gather the crumbs under His table ; only hoping for the least of all His mercies, as we present ourselves in the name of His dear Son.

The centurion thought worse of himself than his friends did of him. They said, 'He is worthy.' He said, 'I am not worthy.' They pleaded his good works—his good wishes for God's people : 'He loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue.' These went for little in commending himself to God's favour and gifts. He had only given to God of His own gifts. He was still unworthy to draw near, or to have the great King come under his roof.

He who sees his own character in the light of God's requirements, sees what the world sees not, and which make him abhor himself and humble himself before a holy God. We may



and should do all we can to promote God's truth and help God's people. It is sowing good seed, it is laying up treasure above, it is a privileged honour, and it is more blessed than receiving; but it must not be the grounds on which we lay claim to mercy or blessings as our right, or a return for what we do. We all come short of God's glory till we stand identified in His sight with the One All-Holy Son of His love.

Lastly, the centurion only asked for a word: 'Say in a word.' His reasoning showed great faith. 'Here am I,' he says, 'only a captain of a troop. I tell my servants what to do. It is done at once. But,' he says, 'Thou hast all power. Only speak and order, and that which I want for my sick servant will be done at once.' And so it was, for while Jesus told those around him to admire such faith, that faith followed the soldier to the bedroom of his servant, and he was 'found whole.'

It were well if we could exercise like faith. Too often we are suffering more than we need do, from not knowing where to look for help in our trouble. Marvellous faith will get for us marvellous help. Jesus would fain have many such applicants who can reason well about His great power and great love. In spite of all un-

worthiness He casts out none, and helps all who come to Him. He cannot come under our roof in the flesh, but in spirit He has promised to be there to believing prayers. We cannot go to Him in His bodily form, but we can see with the eye of faith, touch with the hand of faith, speak with the tongue of faith ; and in all cases of trouble or want, according to our faith, so will it be done to us.

May the Lord find more such faith in each of us !

## XXV.

### SECRET THINGS.

‘The secret things belong unto the Lord our God : but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.’—*Deut.* xxix. 29.

‘Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty : neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.

‘Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother : my soul is even as a weaned child.’

*Psalm* cxxxii. 1, 2.

‘The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him ; and He will show them His covenant.’—*Psalm* xxv. 14.

‘Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets.’—*Amos* iii. 7.

THESE words remind us that in scanning God’s works and ways there is a limit beyond which we cannot go. Consequently, true wisdom is to be contented with that degree of knowledge which God gives of Himself and His works.

David was a prophet, and had many things revealed to him by the Holy Ghost. Yet you see he compares himself to a ‘weaned child.’ He felt there were some things ‘too high’ for him. He restrained his thoughts, and did not

exercise them on those matters which God had not revealed to him.

God has His secrets as men have theirs; but He gives us revelations in the degree and in the manner He thinks good for us, and sufficient to induce obedience. These belong to us and our children to search into and understand. These belong to us; and as it is said it is the glory of God to conceal things, so it is for man to exercise his mind in searching out things that are revealed. 'The Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God.'

In this world and with our finite capacities we must remain in the dark as to many of those mysteries, both in Nature and in heavenly things, which we should exceedingly like to know more about.

We cannot be surprised at this. Our minds are too small to grasp the mind and thoughts of the Infinite. Besides, God conceals some things which perhaps we could understand, on purpose to test and try our faith. We must take Him on trust, and feel sure where He is silent it is best for us to be satisfied and remain ignorant. So Moses found when asking God for something he had not, God said, 'Let it suffice thee; speak to Me no more on this matter.'

After all, we are in relation to God but as

infants. 'We know in part. . . .' 'When I was a child I spake as a child, I understood as a child.' As little children ask their parents a hundred things they would like to know, but receive for answer, 'You are too young to understand,' so we 'see but part of His ways.'

Thus must we contentedly take our place as little children in relation to the great God, and behave ourselves as a weaned child.

The eyes of our minds are adapted in their vision for just what God has made or is willing to make plain to us. 'Now we see through a glass darkly, now we know in part.' We are to be contented with the promise that we shall one day 'see face to face, and know God as He knows us.'

But this, after all, is not found easy to men of great minds and powers of thought. Man in his natural condition resists these limitations. He would fain be wiser than God would have him. This desire becomes disastrous in its results to many. As it was the temptation to Adam and Eve to be as gods, knowing more than God had thought fit to reveal, so it is now. Man becomes 'vain in his imaginations, and professing to be wise, becomes a fool.' Man not being permitted to know all, refuses to accept the little he is permitted to know if he seeks to learn in God's own way.

Yet, after all, how little do we know of all the things around us and about us and within us! We are limited on every side. We are mysteries to ourselves, being fearfully and wonderfully made. The union between body and mind, between reasoning powers and the matter or substance on which they act, 'such knowledge is too wonderful for me, I cannot attain unto it.'

The action of electricity ; the movement of the needle towards the pole ; the maintenance of the vital spark within us ; the atmosphere in which God makes us 'live, move, and have our being ;' the gravitation of everything to the centre of the earth, and the way the same principle acts on all the heavenly bodies ; those heavenly orbs themselves—all these are mysteries of which we know next to nothing beyond the fact of their existence and something about their action.

Can we wonder that those spiritual things which are not visible to the human eye, and those eternal verities concerning the great and Almighty Creator of all, should be shrouded in mysteries beyond our power to unravel? Can we be surprised to be continually met with the prohibition from on high, 'Thus far, and no farther'? Secret things belong to God ; the things that are revealed are for us, and even for our very babes, to understand.

God has in a measure and in a way revealed Himself to us. Of course with a limit, as it is said, 'Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?' (Job xi.).

God has revealed Himself to us first in creation. Created things reveal His 'eternal power and Godhead.' And if men do not learn to glorify God as Designer and Artificer of the worlds in all their glory, it is because they have not the will or the inclination to do so, and their foolish heart is darkened, so that 'they are without excuse' (Romans i.).

God has revealed Himself in the Book of the Revelation of Himself as seen in the Person and work of Him who is in the bosom of the Father. He has spoken by His Son.

He would not have us remain in ignorance of Himself, for that would be to remain in the darkness of death. 'This is life eternal, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.' Thus, then, there is a way of seeing God and living. He is not an unknown God, nor an unknowable God. The eye of faith sees Him in Christ. 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. . . .' 'No man hath seen

God at any time ; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.'

This is the chief, the greatest, and the most important of the things revealed to us and to our children. It is revealed to us in His Word, and it is revealed to all those who come to Jesus as babes to be taught. So spake Jesus, 'I thank Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes ; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight.'

Having this knowledge to begin with, the other revealed truths become plain, and bring contentment as to all God keeps close in His own bosom.

He has many secrets yet unrevealed, even to the very angels around His throne. To us still more.

These are among secret things : The beginning and end of sin and evil spirits ; the punishment of the impenitent, 'bodies and souls, in hell' ; the meaning of everlasting destruction ; the way in which the righteous shall find perfect happiness in heaven ; their employment there, their movements there, their intercourse with angels and saints, their knowledge of their earthly friends



in glory ; the state of the infants there, who died here in an undeveloped state ; the exact nature of a spiritual body ; the compatibility of our own happiness with the knowledge of the souls that are cast away ; the way we can be perfectly happy with the memory of the guilty past. These are but a few of the secret things not yet told us. We are content to wait. We know enough of God as in Christ to make us love Him with all our hearts, to make us sure He is acting wisely and lovingly in all that befalls us. We know for certain that we need lack no good thing here, and certainly shall not want anything hereafter that makes for eternal happiness. We know enough to make us thankful and wish to serve Him here, and to see His face and serve Him hereafter ; enough to enable us in all humility, but with joyful heart, to say, ‘ As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness : I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness ’ (Psalm xvii. 15).

## XXVI.

### SORROWFUL MOTHER OF A PRAYING SON.

‘And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren : and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow.

‘And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me ! And God granted him that which he requested.’

*1 Chronicles iv. 9, 10.*

THIS account of Jabez might easily be overlooked. It occurs in the midst of a long list of names of Israelites, whose pedigrees it was thought necessary to keep in these books of the kings of Israel, called therefore Chronicles.

But the fact that it so occurs shows it is of exceptional interest, and also that the story of Jabez is picked out from a long list of persons whose history is passed over as not worthy of special record. ‘Jabez was more honourable than his brethren.’ There must have been something

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very peculiar in the course and events of his life. And so the record does not pass over his name with a mere mention, as of the others, but tells us in what way he was remarkable, and how it came to be so.

This little biography is written for our benefit, that we may act like Jabez, and may get the same blessing and happiness.

There is but little said of him, but that little is weighty, and implies a great deal more than is told us.

The chief lesson of his life is that he prayed for certain things, and that he got from God all that he asked for. 'God granted him his request.' First, a little is said of his birth and his mother. She gave him a name which would always be a reminder that 'she bare him in sorrow.' We are not told all that caused her the sorrow over this one child more than the others she gave birth to. To bring forth in sorrow is the curse on all Eve's descendants. Perhaps her pains were excessive, and it may be, like Phinehas' wife, she died in childbirth, with only time to give the name to the child. Or it may be her husband, the child's father, had lately died and left her a widow. What the special sorrow was we are not told. But of this we may be sure, that, like all trials sanctified by God, good came out of it. It was

a season of trial turned into a season of earnest prayer—the child taught to pray and early to seek God; the child trained up in the way it should go, and never after departing from it. A child of prayers and of tears to its mother will generally be a source of comfort and joy to the mother in after years. But a ‘child left to itself bringeth its mother to shame.’ If a mother be a praying mother, she may have cause indeed to say of some of her offspring, ‘I bare him with sorrow.’ But she will afterwards have reason to say, with Hannah, ‘For this child I prayed. . . . As long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord.’

The prayer of Jabez as he grew up to be a man is a prayer that any young man can use, and may expect to be answered. It was an earnest entreaty for God’s blessing: ‘Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!’ The blessing of the Lord maketh rich. Without it we cannot be really happy, or prosper in such a way as to give us peace in this world and everlasting peace hereafter. He prayed for earthly blessings—‘that Thou wouldest enlarge my coast.’ God granted this also—more land than he had, and this implied more flocks and herds. We may ask for earthly things, if only with God’s blessing and with His grace to use rightly and not

abuse. Then he asked next 'that Thine hand may be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me.' The Lord granted all this. He did find the labour of his hands were blessed, because God's hand was with him. God did keep him from evil—from the Evil One, from evil men of the world, from the evil of strong temptation, from the evil of falling into grievous sin, from following evil example. Not, indeed, from all that the world calls evil in the way of trials and afflictions, for, as his mother would tell him, these are often God's way of bestowing His richest blessings. But he was kept from the evil of repining, murmuring, or charging God foolishly; for these are real evils, and 'God granted him that which he requested.'

Let this simple prayer encourage us to make like requests to our Heavenly Father. He has promised to answer them. Jesus prayed that His disciples might be kept from the evil of the world. And Jesus bids us pray for ourselves:

Deliver us from the Evil One.' The promise is sure to be fulfilled. 'All things, whatsoever you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.' Whatsoever is asked in the name of Christ is promised by a God that cannot lie, by a God to whom all things are possible. He who prays

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such a prayer fervently, faithfully, will assuredly find it answered effectually.

Jabez pleaded with the 'God of Israel.' We plead with the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Israel as a prince prevailed with God and man. Jesus is our Advocate and Intercessor with the Father. Not one thing that is really for our good will He withhold. Only put things in the right order in your prayers—His blessing first, His hand always with you, keeping you from the evil of sin—and then all such earthly blessings as shall not hinder these ends, but help you towards them, shall be given. 'Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.'

Happy is that mother whose sorrows have led her to dedicate her child to God, and happy is that child who, like Jabez, learns early to commit all his ways to a Heavenly Father, and who has found by happy experience God grants every single request that is made in faith in the name of His dear Son.

## XXVII.

### GOD'S PEOPLE IN DARKNESS.

'Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

'Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.'

*Isaiah l. 10, 11.*

GOD'S people are here represented as for a time being in darkness and having no light. That they are His children nevertheless is plain; for they are spoken of as 'fearing God and obeying the voice of His servant.' This can only be applicable to those who are endeavouring to walk in the right way, and looking for guidance from those who are appointed to teach them. The voice of His servant must mean the voice of the prophet of the day, or the voice of Moses written in the Law. Isaiah was the prophet of the day. He prophesied in 'the

days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.' How then was it the people of God could be walking in darkness? It was partly due to their own fault; partly to the gross darkness of those around them not observing the light which came forth from the voice of God's servants. There were false prophets who misled people. The prophets prophesied falsely, and too often the people loved to have it so. They liked to have smooth things rather than true things told them. On this account the prophet was commissioned to pass judgment upon them. 'Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes.' And so it was said, 'if one looked unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow' (see Isaiah v., vi.). This helped to keep even God's people in darkness; for where iniquity abounds, and there are more false teachers than true, it is the more difficult to find and to walk in the narrow path of light and truth.

Then, again, God's people, who listened even gladly to the voice of His servants, could see but obscurely the things the prophets declared about the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel. He of whom it was foretold He should be the



Light of the world, the great Light which the people who walk in darkness were to see. Isaiah and other holy men of old 'inquired and searched diligently, searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.' Here was foretold the shining of the Sun of Righteousness, Him who is the Light of the world, following which men should not walk in darkness, but have the light of life. But those things were not so clearly revealed as they have been since the advent of Christ and the preaching of the Apostles, therefore God's servants strained their eyes often in vain to get light on many things, and the dim reflected light they did see was too often but as darkness to them. So they 'obeyed the voice of His servants and feared the Lord, and yet walked in comparative darkness.' But they are told to trust in the Name of the Lord and to stay upon God, and light would come; for light is sown for the righteous, and in God's light we may see light. Light always does come to those who wait for it. The words must be fulfilled, 'I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.' But then comes the contrast which the

ungodly present by their darkness with those who *do* look for light in the right quarter. 'Behold, all ye that kindle a fire . . . walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand ; ye shall lie down in sorrow.'

What a difference between the light and warmth you may get from a fire, and the light and warmth from basking in the sunlight ! The one is earthly light, which men kindle with their own hands ; the other the light that is from the sun above. The one gives feeble light and warms and cheers for a little while, and then leaves darkness and cold ; the other is like the rising of the sun, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

This is the difference between those who, in the darkness and ignorance by which this world is enveloped, try to get light from their own minds without seeking for God's truth. Men say the world is wrapped in mystery. We cannot see God ; we cannot see the future ; we cannot see the way to another or a better world. All is darkness before and behind. Then they try to get light from their own understanding. Science and philosophical researches satisfy them for a time, but they are poor lights, only sparks ; they cannot so find out God or God's

truths about another world or about sin, about holiness, about peace and happiness. And when they lie down on their beds to die they lie down in sorrow. This they have at God's hand, because they have not feared Him or obeyed the voice of His servants.

Then, too, there are the light and sparks that men compass themselves with who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. Their fires look cheerful. They derive pleasure from all the various amusements and excitements of the world; they say, 'Aha! I have seen the fire, I am warm; I will eat, drink, and be merry.' But what is the end of it all? Their laughter is turned into sorrow; it is like the crackling of thorns under pots. The fires of youthful pleasures and excitements die out; nothing is left when they come to die, only dark ashes of disappointed desires, decay of nature; they lie down in sorrow and wake up to judgment.

The lesson is for us. We may at times be tempted to say, 'All is dark around me; God seems to hide His face. I can get no real comfort, no peace in the contemplation of spiritual truths, no strong assurance of the love of a Saviour for me personally, no good hope for the unseen future world.'

See how far it is due to some earthborn cloud that is shutting out the light from the Sun of Righteousness, so that you cannot see afar off. There can be no change in Him, no variableness, or shadows, or eclipses. You want more light within; you want scales removed, clouds dispersed; you must give more heed to the light which shineth in dark places—the Word of God and of Christ—and watching against all that comes between you and your God, and praying for more and more light: it will come. Light is sown for the righteous; the Daystar will arise in your hearts, and the Sun of Righteousness shine with healing in His rays.

## XXVIII.

### GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES.

‘Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises : that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.’—2 *Peter* i. 4.

FROM Genesis to Revelation God’s Word is full of promises; and as He knows what is for man’s real good, and as there is no limit to His love to promise, His wisdom to adapt, and His power to fulfil, these promises must be ‘exceeding great’ and very ‘precious.’

They are what is wanted by the world, by the Church, and by individuals. They are to work out God’s good will towards man, in giving him life and godliness, in enabling him to escape the corruptions of the world and the pollutions of his own heart’s imaginations, which are evil, by making him ‘partaker of the Divine nature.’

When man had sinned, and was banished from the Divine Presence in Eden, he went out in possession of the first promise, which is still

in course of fulfilment to the world, to the Church, and to the members individually of that Church.

The promise was, 'The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent.' It was renewed to Abraham in another form: 'In thee and thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' As God is true and faithful, Satan will be bruised one day under the feet of all His people.

St. Paul writes thus of God's promises: 'All the promises of God in Him are yea and amen, to the glory of God by us.' He means they are certain to be fulfilled; they are given in and through Christ; and through us, the Apostles, the Prophets, all inspired to proclaim them to the glory of God, in such a way that God is glorified in their fulfilment.

No wonder they are called 'exceeding great and precious'!

They are great as God the Giver is great—the Almighty, the All-wise, the All-loving, the All-faithful. What good are promises if the giver is not equal to the performance? Bank of England notes are of value if genuine, because the Bank can pay their value and is trustworthy, as is shown by the words 'I promise,' written and signed. But all man's promises are dependent

on man's capacity, which is limited. Not so with God's 'I will,' 'I promise'; where that is written we know we can reckon on a fulfilment; there can be no let or hindrance, no lack of power, no lack of truth. He is the owner of heaven and earth; and heaven and earth shall pass away before one single letter of any of His promises shall fail.

'Exceeding great,' also, because so comprehensive. They are free to whosoever will come and ask to have them fulfilled for themselves; none are excluded. No poor sinner can say, 'They are not for me—they are too good; they are for this or that class or character.' Whosoever will, let him come—whosoever believeth, whosoever is athirst.

'Great and precious,' because they include everything really for our good and happiness—exactly suited to our wants as fallen, weak, helpless mortals, as tempted, erring, frail, guilty, and dying. All things are contained in them that belong to 'life and godliness,' to 'glory and virtue'—all things that will tend to deliver us from the wickedness around us and in us.

'Great and precious,' because He is faithful that promises. God cannot lie. The Strength of Israel will not lie or repent; with Him is no variableness or shadow of turning. 'Hath He

spoken, and shall He not do it? and hath He said, and shall He not make it good?' His glory is concerned in their fulfilment. Given in Christ, given to Christ by covenant for all in Christ, Christ is the faithful and true Witness, whose name is security itself. Given, too, with an oath, as well as on His word of promise, as it is said that 'by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.' So that all who will only patiently wait are sure to obtain the promise, whatever it is.

Let us be sure that we lay claim to this most blessed heritage, and make good use of these great and precious promises.

We may know them well enough as they lie on the pages of Scripture, but do we know them by experience of their fulfilment towards ourselves? We may know many of them by heart, yet not have realized their Divine power to give us peace and life and godliness. We may have heard them read in our hearing time after time, in church or elsewhere, and yet not have been made through them wise unto salvation, or partakers of the Divine nature.

They are for us to read, learn, mark, and inwardly digest, till they fill us with joy and peace



in believing them, and make us abound in a happy hope.

We may safely lean with all our weight on them, and they will bear us safely through all the difficult and arduous paths of life in a wilderness world. We should not walk on them as though they were thin ice that will crack and break under our feet, but as on hard, solid rock that will bear us safely.

We must learn to plead them in prayer, according to our want : search out what is suitable to our case, and say with David, 'Thou hast said ; now, Lord, do as Thou hast said.' Everything we want is there, and can be had for asking, so long as the 'glory of God' is the end in view.

Promises first should be pleaded for all things tending to life and godliness ; promises next for all things pertaining to peace and happiness. And these, too, shall be added ; for God is faithful, and nothing is too hard for the Lord. 'All things are possible to him that believeth,' and no good thing will He withhold.

## XXIX.

### DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.

#### PART I.

‘Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.’—*St. Matthew* xxviii. 19.

‘How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?’—*Hebrews* ix. 14.

‘For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.’—*Ephesians* ii. 18.

THESE are some out of many passages in Scripture in which the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit are brought together in one view, and are to be known in the experience of the Christian.

There are other still better-known passages teaching the same truths, as, for example, where the Apostle to the Corinthians prays that ‘the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost’ may be with them.

These are but samples of a great many like passages which teach the same doctrine, and which readily occur to the mind of every reader of God's Word.

The doctrine of the Trinity, however, does not depend on a few isolated texts for proof. It pervades the whole Bible from one end to the other.

It enters into every part of the great scheme of our salvation as effected by God the Father through His Son and by the work of the Holy Ghost.

And we cannot imagine anyone having a real and blessed experience of the work of God in his soul without thus thinking of the doctrine of the Trinity. The actual word 'Trinity' may not be found in Scripture; the doctrine which the name implies is unmistakably there.

All members of the Church of England will know how expressly this doctrine is taught in her formularies; how we begin our Litany with invocation of the Trinity; and how in one of the Creeds she unfolds the doctrine in such a way as to meet every possible objection ever raised to any part of it.

No one denies it is a mystery, and that it is not easy to explain, though easy to believe, as set forth in God's Word.

We lack words to convey accurately the sense of Divine mysteries. When we speak of three Persons, the mind naturally thinks of human beings, and of course it is not easy to explain how each Person of the Trinity is equal to the Father in respect of Divine Nature, and yet not making three Gods, but one.

The Athanasian Creed is a witness to these difficulties in explaining the mystery, but also to the way in which the doctrine was disputed about in the early days of the Church's history, and how the explanation came to be embodied in the form of the Creed.

You will recall an allusion to the doctrine in some of our Lord's last words on earth when telling His Apostles to baptize in the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Name implies Personage.

To deal now only with the first part of the doctrine. It is very striking how careful St. Paul is always to speak of the Son of God in such a way as to show he at least believed in the words of Jesus, 'I and My Father are one.'

Look at the opening address of any of his Epistles, and you will see how he places the Name of Christ on an equality with God the Father. 'Grace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'; 'The grace of God given

you by Jesus Christ'; 'An Apostle by Jesus Christ and God the Father.' Such are but samples of his invariable way of speaking of the Father and the Son, showing that he knew what Jesus had taught His disciples, that 'all men should honour the Son as they honour the Father.'

We honour God as our Creator, but we also say, 'All things were made by Christ, and without Him was not anything made.' We honour God the Father with highest adoration and worship, such as no creature, angel, or archangel, may have. But we equally pray to the Son, and worship and adore Him as all the angels in heaven do, casting their crowns before the Lamb; as it is written, when He bringeth the Son into the world, 'Let all the angels of God worship Him.'

We honour God the Father as Him in whom we live and move and have our being, as the Ruler and Upholder of all the worlds. So of Christ it is written, 'All things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist' (Colossians i.). 'In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.'

When Jesus was on earth the power of the Godhead was manifested in Him when He

raised the dead, when He commanded the wind and the sea, when He opened blind eyes, and forgave sins which none but God can forgive. The accusation which brought Him to death, which he never denied, was, 'He made Himself equal with God.'

Such, then, is the plain and undeniable view of God's own Word of this greatest of all mysteries, 'God manifest in the flesh.'

Let us ever show our belief in it by the practical bearing it has on our lives, our hopes, our worship.

Here is a ladder reaching to the highest heavens by which we ascend thither. Its base is on the earth in the perfect manhood of Christ. It reaches to heaven in the perfect Godhead of Christ.

We the children of God are all partakers of flesh and blood. He likewise has partaken of our nature that we might be made partakers of the Divine nature. He the Son of God became the Son of Man, that we the sons of men might become the sons of God.

O wondrous mystery! O wondrous love! He made Himself below angels, of no reputation among men, that we might be placed above angels among all the saints in glory.

Such an One have we in the highest heavens

at this moment, yet a man that as man He could become our substitute in suffering the penalty of sin, as man be tempted, as man be sympathizing with each one ; but withal as God a Holy Perfect Substitute and able to succour the tempted, save the weakest and vilest sinners to the uttermost if only they come unto God by Him.

Is there a real vital union between you and Him ? Otherwise all this will profit you nothing. 'As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name.' Of all such and to all such are the words of the Apostle applicable, 'But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.'

Thus only through Him by one and the same Holy Spirit we all, whether Jew or Gentile, have access to our God and Father.

## XXX.

### DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.

#### PART II.

‘Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

‘And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

‘And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.’

*1 Corinthians xii. 4-6.*

THIS is one of many instances where in one view we see a distinction in the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

As we have seen in other similar passages, so here there is a distinction in the parts performed by each Person, and yet they all act together.

The Apostle is desirous that this should be kept clear in the minds of people. He reminds them that while they were differently endowed with gifts, they all came from the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He willed. There was but one great Head of the Church, which was Christ; and there was but



one God and Father of all, from whom all proceeded, and for whose glory they all were acting.

In a former discourse we have seen how God the Father and the Son were One in essential nature, One in purpose, and One in working. 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' We will now inquire what is written that makes it right to say, 'As the Father is God, and the Son is God, so also the Holy Ghost is God ; yet there are not three Gods, but one.'

This is not difficult to show, if we remember that God is a Spirit, and a Holy Spirit, and 'Ghost' is only another word for Spirit.

To say, therefore, that God the Holy Ghost is He who, proceeding from God the Father, and dwelling among us, and operating in the hearts of all where Christ is received, is no more than what every Christian must see as the plain teaching of Scripture. What God the Father is said to do, and what God the Son is said to do, that the Holy Ghost is also said to do.

Did God, the Father of all, call this world into existence, and did He do so by His Son, by whom all things were made, so it was the Spirit that moved on the face of the deep, and changed chaos into order.

All things were made by God speaking the

word. What is that but saying they were made by the breath or spirit of His mouth?

When God said, 'Let us make man in our image,' which is Christ, He breathed into the image, and man became a living soul.

The Holy Ghost is spoken of as having a will, as directing, speaking, inspiring, moving, leading, guiding, dividing, enlightening, all which imply Personage or Being, as much as in the case of the Son and the Father.

You will note, too, the practical bearing of this truth, which adds to its importance.

Satan is a spirit, an evil spirit, and as such acts as an unseen, subtle, silent influence on men's minds. The counteracting influence is the Spirit of holiness. There is a spirit of error, a lying spirit, which can fill men's minds with evil intents. The counteracting to this is the Spirit of Truth, which guides into all truth, and takes of the things of Christ, who is the Truth, and teaches and comforts men's hearts. There is a spirit of the world, which conforms people to the feelings and ways of the world; and there is a Spirit of God and of Christ, which conforms believers to the will and ways of God, transforming by renewing them.

The Holy Spirit moved holy men of old to write the sacred Scriptures, and the prophets of

old spake as they were moved by that Spirit. So also a spirit of falsehood moved in the minds of false prophets in those days. And we are told there will be false prophets and false teachers in the last days.

There is the spirit of this world, which is also the spirit that works in the children of disobedience. But the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of loving obedience in the children of God.

All this is experienced by those to whom God gives His Holy Spirit. And they are new creatures in Christ, created after the image of Christ, which is called the 'new man, which after God is created in righteousness and holiness of truth.' They are said to have received not the spirit of this world, but 'the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given us of God.'

It is by the Spirit that Christ fulfils to us His promise, 'I will not leave you comfortless ; I will come to you.' This, again, is the fulfilment of the promise, 'If a man love Me, he will keep My words ; and My Father will love him, and we will come into him and make our abode with him.'

We will notice two more passages which thus speak of the Spirit's work as one with the work of Christ and of God.

It is said that 'Christ, through the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God' (Heb. ix. 14). And of His resurrection it is said, 'He was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of Holiness, by the resurrection from the dead' (Rom. i.).

Lastly, see the figurative representations of the Triune God in His manifestations to man in the Book of Revelation. The Eternal Father on the throne, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, yet the Alpha and Omega, in conjunction with 'seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the world.' Jesus sends His angel to testify these things in the churches, and invites us to 'Come, and the Spirit and the bride say, Come.'

These are, then, a few of the most convincing proofs of the Doctrine of the Trinity.

Let our own heart's experience be a further testimony to it. Be it ours ever thus to know the true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, which is eternal life. Ours to feel the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, and to be constrained by the love of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Ours to have more and more the spirit of adoption, by which we cry, Abba, Father. Ours to pray from our hearts :

'Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,  
And lighten with celestial fire ;  
Thou the anointing Spirit art,  
Who dost Thy sevenfold gifts impart ;  
Thy blessed unction from above  
Is comfort, life, and fire of love.'

Or again :

'Now to the Father, to the Son,  
And to the Spirit, Three in One,  
Be praise and thanks and glory given,  
By men on earth, by saints in heaven.'

## XXXI.

### PRAYER AFTER THE MODEL PRAYER.

‘ But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

‘ But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do : for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

‘ Be not ye therefore like unto them : for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him.

‘ After this manner therefore pray ye : Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.

‘ Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

‘ Give us this day our daily bread.

‘ And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

‘ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil : For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

‘ For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you :

‘ But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.’

*St. Matthew vi. 6-15.*

WE should all earnestly try to remember and follow all our Lord’s instructions on the subject of prayer. Many mistakes about it existed in

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His days; many are common now. All men, not excepting the heathen, feel the need of praying to a higher power. But while formal prayer and vain repetitions are natural to the human heart, real effectual prayer is the result of grace, which leads to praying in spirit and in truth.

In special answer to the request of the disciples, their Master gave them a model prayer, which we call the Lord's Prayer, and which has been in use among Christians from that day to this. But it has been abused. We may fear it has been productive of that very error which our Lord warned against, when He said, 'Use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do.' We cannot be wrong in saying that these words of our Lord's Prayer have been repeated with the lips over and over again, without heart, and without really wishing for the things named. And then the most beautiful words become a 'vain repetition.'

Always remember our Lord meant it to be a model or pattern, after which our prayers, public or private, should be formed. He meant to teach us what we ought to ask in prayer, and how we ought to ask; the order which our petitions should follow: what first, what last.

First, we are to draw near to the great God as OUR FATHER. This privilege have all His

disciples. His Father is our Father. His God our God. So He said to His disciples: 'The Father Himself loveth you because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God.' What manner of love is here! 'To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.'

Secondly, our first desires are to be about our Father's business. We pray for His kingdom and the fulfilment of His will: 'As in heaven so on earth.' Nothing hinders it in heaven—angels do it. Much hinders it on earth—men and devils oppose it. The god of this world is a mighty Power: blinds men, tempts men, leads men captive, and so hinders the kingdom of grace, the doing of God's will. God's children are of a mind with Christ, the Lawful King. They would fain see the world put under His feet, as it will be eventually. For this they pray first and foremost—that the kingdom of grace may be furthered in men's minds, the kingdom of glory established. This missionary spirit comes first.

Thirdly, God would have His children trust Him and ask Him for their daily supply. We



may happen to have abundance and our store full. Yet without Him we cannot enjoy it. 'Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.' He knows what we have need of, yet we are to prove our trust by asking. Next comes the important petition for that remission of sin which God alone has power to give. True it is, there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, as all His true children are. Now they are clean through the word He has spoken. Yet, as when washed in a bath the feet get soiled on the ground, we have need daily to ask for faith in the cleansing blood of the Lamb, that, our conscience not accusing us, we may serve by love. And this, too, as a test of our showing the same loving spirit to our fellow-men. For 'if ye forgive not them, neither will your Father forgive you.'

The last petition is to be kept from evil. Evil as from the Evil One, putting temptation in our way. We cannot keep ourselves. Jesus in His prayer said, 'I pray that Thou wouldest keep them from the evil.'

The devil is strong; the world is ensnaring to all, our hearts are deceitful. Each day brings its temptations and its dangers. He only is safe who really prays as Jesus thus directs us to do.

This, then, is the order, this the spirit of our

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prayers. Ever keep the model before you, and your prayers will be acceptable to God, and profitable to yourself.

Use it also as the model of united prayer. He tells us to pray with others. Our Father, give us, forgive us, keep us. No Christian can be so selfish as to pray for himself only; children of one Father, we share in His love. We care for each other's welfare. We help one another as members of the same family, heirs of the same glory. And thus meeting in one spirit at the throne of grace, we are helping each other along the road that leads to the kingdom, through the pathway of obedience to His will.

His is the kingdom, His the Power, His the glory. We think of Him as 'Our Father,' but also as the great God clothed with all the attributes of majesty, glory and power; all these are exercised in our behalf, because in Christ Jesus He is able to deal with us as children.

Thus let us avoid the vain repetition of a paternoster, in the use of the best prayer ever given to the world. And our use will bring the best blessings to ourselves and our friends.

## XXXII.

### THE KIND THAT NEEDS SPECIAL PRAYER.

‘ And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto Thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit ;

‘ And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him : and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away : and I spake unto Thy disciples that they should cast him out ; and they could not.

‘ He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you ? how long shall I suffer you ? bring him unto Me.

‘ And they brought him unto Him : and when He saw him, straightway the spirit tare him ; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.

‘ And He asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him ? And he said, Of a child.

‘ And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him : but if Thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.

‘ Jesus saith unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.

‘ And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe ; help Thou mine unbelief.

‘ When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more.

‘ And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him : and he was as one dead : insomuch that many said, He is dead.

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‘ But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up ; and he arose.

‘ And when He was come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, Why could not we cast him out ?

‘ And He said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.’

*St. Mark ix. 17-29.*

THIS miracle is specially instructive above others on several accounts.

There is the excessive violence of the poor lunatic under the power of the devil.

There is the evidence that, as said elsewhere, the devil has the power of death, and often inclines men to commit suicide.

There is the poor father’s distress of mind, and his pathetic appeal to the Lord to help him to believe more than he did. There is the failure of the disciples to cast out the evil spirit, and the reasons given by our Lord for that failure ; and then the remarkable statement of our Lord about this kind of evil spirit, how it is to be overcome only by prayer and fasting.

The devil seems to have had very special power in possessing persons in those days. It may be that he knew his destroyer was about to be manifested by the birth of the promised seed of the woman. So that he was making desperate efforts to do his worst to his unfortunate victims, just before Jesus began His ministry.

But even now it would hardly be wrong to say that in cases where insane people are made very violent, hurtful to others, and for themselves seeking death, there the Evil One is possessing persons as truly as in former days. And if so, who shall set a limit to what prayers of faith can do in overcoming the Evil One.

Anyhow, we know for a fact, independently of insanity, the devil does gain possession of some in the present day, so that they seem driven by him, or led captive by him, into fearful excesses of evil doing.

It is the devil who by degrees has led on some evil-disposed person to commit murder from a spirit of jealousy, or love of gain, or other unbridled passions.

It is the devil who has gradually induced some weak man or woman to yield to the love of intoxicating drink, so that they are overcome by it, to the infliction of suffering and injury on their family, and on their own health and even life, as when delirium tremens fills their minds with horrid visions, and leads them to self-destruction.

Or even where there is no such violent outward demonstration of his power, the Evil One is as truly possessing and leading to ruin those who, casting off all fear of God, and all godliness

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of character, are really doing the devil's work, by taking side against Christ. It is the devil who blinds men, lest the light of the knowledge of Christ should shine into them, and lead them to Christ for deliverance.

Now here our Lord seems to say that in some of these cases the devil has attained to such a complete mastery over his victim, that no ordinary faith will avail to cast him out. It is still true now as then, that Christ alone can really do this. Christ alone destroys the works of the devil. But still true it is, that He works by His servants—giving 'power over unclean spirits.'

But, as with many of the best things we want, so with this urgent desire for deliverance from Satanic possession: there must be strong crying and tears of supplication, there must be continued, persevering prayer to the Great Master, before the victory is completed. In some cases Satan may relax his hold more readily, but in some he holds more determinedly.

His fearful power permitted him must always be a mystery to us, but here it is an undoubted fact. He has power, and in some cases more than others. Our blessed Lord had agonizing prayer and supplication, with strong crying and tears to Him that was able to save Him from

death, before He got the victory over the enemy. Can we wonder if it be necessary in the case of poor weak mortals like ourselves to do the same?

The Lord told the disciples in the present instance that the weakness of their faith was the cause of their failure. And the way to get more faith would have been to cry earnestly to Heaven for it. When prayer is joined to fasting, it implies that such prayers are to be helped by keeping the body in subjection, so that the spirit is free to wrestle with the great Spirit of all flesh. Thus we see why it is said this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

Nor let us forget here the struggle for faith on the part of the distressed parent. He had begun to despair of the salvation of his son. Jesus was absent on the Mount. He had brought his child to His servants, to whom Christ had given power over unclean spirits. He saw their utter failure. The devil was too strong. Might he not be too strong even for their Master? So his words showed doubts: 'If Thou canst do anything.' Jesus said the limit to his wishes for his child was not in Him, but in the father. 'If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.' Then came the touching appeal. The father, with tears, cries out, 'Lord, I do believe.

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I try to believe, I want to believe, but I find it hard to believe; but Thou must help me to believe. Help Thou mine unbelief.'

Jesus is never wanting in compassion or in power to help to the uttermost of our wants. He lays down no hard and fast rules about the measure of faith in His people. He knows our difficulty, He knows the weakness of the flesh where the spirit is most willing. He meets the praying, struggling soul more than half-way. He asks for faith that He can do what we want, but He also gives the faith that He asks for.

Oh that we might trust Him more implicitly in all our troubles—fathers and mothers for their children, friends for friends, whatever be the seemingly desperate case that distresses you, whatever the utter failure of all human means you have tried! Hear Him say, 'Bring him to Me,' and let there be fervent, persevering, continuous prayer, and only believe your help will come from the same merciful and faithful High Priest, who always has compassion and will avenge His people speedily, though He bear long with them.



### XXXIII.

#### 'GO AGAIN SEVEN TIMES.'

'So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees,

'And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times.

'And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.

'And it came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain.'

*I Kings xviii. 42-45.*

WE are apt to think that these holy men of old who did such wonderful things by prayer are beyond us as examples. We are tempted to say, with Gideon, 'Where be all the miracles which our fathers told us of?' And thus unbelief militates against the power of prayer in the present day. This should not be so. St. James, writing for the Christians of all ages, reminds us that effectual fervent prayer is still of avail. And, though Elijah produced great miracles in

answer to prayer, yet he is an example for all ages. And he refers to the two chief answers to prayer which he received in the days of Ahab, king of Israel. He says :

'Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain ; and it rained not on the earth, by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.'

You observe he says he was a man of like passions with us, in order that we may not think of his example as beyond our imitation—as if he knew we should be tempted to do so because we cannot expect such wonders. These two exercises of faith in the Lord of heaven and earth are very helpful. It is to the latter I draw attention now.

The first prayer for a drought, with all its dreadful consequences, was no doubt offered under instigation of God, that the whole nation might by such a judgment be brought to see its sin and repent.

The second prayer for rain was after the nation had received the most convincing proof that the God of Israel was the true God, and after the slaughter of four hundred of the idolatrous priests of Baal.

We learn from both instances that we may pray and expect answers for things entirely beyond the power of man to bring to pass. Jesus has power in heaven and earth, power over the elements; and prayer in His Name for the things which are impossible with man, and only possible with God, are still to be offered as effectively as in Elijah's days, or the days of the disciples in the storms.

You will notice another remarkable feature in this exercise of the prophet's faith. He prayed for what he knew was to come, for what God had said He would send, and therefore he prayed for what some would have said you need not ask—it is coming.

The word of the Lord was plain. 'Go, show thyself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.' He did show himself to Ahab, and he told him to expect rain. And yet after that he went to Mount Carmel, and there fell down in the attitude of supplicating prayer for the promised blessing. We learn, then, that the promise of a blessing does not do away with the need of praying for it. Our Lord prayed for His disciples many things which were already secure to them by the faithfulness of God His Father. Christ Himself prayed with strong crying and tears before His Passion, though His persever-

ance in doing His Father's will was sure from all eternity.

God has promised blessings to His Church in the future, but He says, 'For this I will be inquired.'

But the chief point in this prayer to which I ask attention is its persevering nature.

He prayed on and on, sending his servant seven times to look for the beginning of the answer before he felt secure about it. 'Go again seven times.'

We all know there was a special meaning in the number seven. It dated from the creation and the seventh day of God's hallowing. So it was God's number—the number of perfection. It connected events with God, as the God of heaven and earth, the Faithful One. Purifications under the law by sprinkling were to be done seven times. Jericho was compassed seven times before its fall. Naaman must wash in Jordan seven times. Peter thought of forgiving seven times as enough. We read of the seven Spirits and the seven churches in the Book of Revelation.

So now Elijah had not prayed enough or looked enough for answer, till his servant had been sent to watch the sky over the sea seven times; and it was at the last time, perhaps with

a long interval between each, that the little cloud like unto a man's hand betokened the triumph of faith, and caused the prophet to send to the king a message, 'Prepare thy chariot and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.'

We learn, then, not only to pray for what God promises, but to go on praying till God sends the smallest token of His purpose to answer.

He could answer speedily. He does not always will to do so. He bears long with His people. He may keep the thorn rankling in the flesh till the third or even seventh time of praying. He says not only ask, but seek, nay, knock. He says men ought always to pray and not to faint. He reminds us that as earthly friends yield to importunity, so God chooses to act as requiring importunity on our part.

The angel who was to let Peter out of prison was held back till the Church had well-nigh given over praying for his deliverance; the last night before the appointed day of execution he is sent forth. And God's people learnt this same great lesson, 'Go again seven times.'

The prophetic Psalm of the Lord's time on the Cross runs thus: 'O my God, I cry in the daytime, and Thou hearest not.'

Shall we expect God to deal differently with His people now? Are there not still many

reasons why He should at times make as though He heard them not, or had forgotten to be gracious ?

Let us bear this in mind. It will be useful in the hour of distress and the day of calamity. And when God's help is the one thing we are craving, and that to come speedily, then let us keep Elijah's faith before our eyes, and his words be our guide and encouragement in going again and again to the mercy-seat.

There are many reasons why promised blessings may be delayed, even to earnest supplications. Satan is allowed to hinder the arrival of the blessing, as St. Paul says Satan hindered his going where he was wanted.

Then God has His own times and seasons for giving what His people crave, which, in His wisdom and foreknowledge, are best suited for their good. We are in a hurry and impatient, whereas His time exactly fits in to the end He has in view. Greater blessings come in His time than in our own.

Lastly, the waiting time, if only it keep us in a spirit of prayer and humble watching, has in itself a hallowing effect on our souls. We get us to our Lord most humbly. We lie low before His footstool, and learn lessons we should not otherwise learn.

Happy are they who do not weary in those waiting seasons. They may be sowing in tears, they may feel the night is long, but joy cometh in the morning. Therefore, 'in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God'—even though it be more than seven times you go and look for the answer ; it is sure to come at last.

## XXXIV.

### NEEDLESS ALARMS.

‘And when He was entered into a ship, His disciples followed Him.

‘And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves : but He was asleep.

‘And His disciples came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, Lord, save us : we perish.

‘And He saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea ; and there was a great calm.

‘But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?’

*St. Matthew viii. 23-27.*

WE read of two storms encountered by the disciples when on the Sea of Galilee with Jesus. Both were made occasions for lessons on the subject of faith, and the way in which faith ought to be strong enough to drive away fears, and will do so in proportion as Jesus is felt to be with us.

One of these storms is recorded in the eighth chapter of St. Matthew, and the other in chapter xiv. The latter seems to have been by night,



the former in the daytime. In the former Jesus was asleep in the ship, and they had to wake Him. In the latter He came to them walking on the sea, between the hours of three and six.

In the storm by day He spoke to the waves and wind, and they obeyed Him, and there was a calm. In the storm by night His appearance on the sea in the dark terrified them, and they thought they saw a spirit, till He spoke and said, 'It is I ; be not afraid.' And in this case Peter, trying to walk to his Master on the sea and failing, received a personal lesson on needless fears and on what stronger faith could do for him.

Here is a beautiful and apt picture of the present position of God's children journeying, as they are, over the rough waves in a life made up of storms and calms.

Where was Jesus when they were thus toiling against a contrary wind? He was on the mountain, some way off, praying. He was passing the night in prayer. Prayer and intercession for His people was going on all the while. A sample of such prayers we have in the 17th chapter of St. John. He was thinking of others. Though absent in the body, He was with them in spirit—not unmindful of them, though they saw Him not.

Jesus has left us in respect of bodily and

visible presence. He has gone up on high. He is in the presence of God for us. He ever liveth to make intercession for us. But He is with each of His disciples in spirit, never unmindful of their difficulties. Yet a little while and He will come to them. We must toil on. He comes in our extremity of want. He comes and says in every dark season, 'It is I; be not afraid.' Never think He is unmindful of or far from you. The night may be very dark and far spent before He comes. Alarms are needless if arising at all from fears lest He has forgotten us. The very form in which the trial comes, and which seems to intensify our fears, is just the form in which He chooses to draw near, and out of which the voice will come if we listen to it, 'It is I; be not afraid.'

In all troubles and tempestuous seasons in life sorrow is unavoidable. Afflictions would not do their work if not for the present 'grievous.' But an inward peace should be enjoyed by all those who, like the disciples, may feel that they are not alone, but their Master is with them. Even when asleep in the ship, and not having His bodily eye on them, there was no more real danger than if He had been steering or there had been a dead calm. But the difficulty was to realize this, when the wind was howling and

the waves splashing over the little vessel, and the vessel filling.

Doubtless, after the calm had come, simply from the Master's speaking to the waves, they saw how groundless their fears. The ship would have righted itself. The sea was only helping them on to their haven. And so, could we see the end, and firmly believe that our God is ordering all, and the very rough and adverse trials are only answering His purpose in our salvation—could we see this with any faith, we should have that calm and peaceful mind which we so often do not realize till our anxious cries have been heard and the storm is passed.

Jesus had constrained them to get into the ship even when He was not going to sail with them. They might be sure that being in the way of obedience He would not forsake them. Where, Jonah-like, we are going in an opposite direction to His will and commandments, where our evil conscience would rather lead us to hide ourselves from Him and incline us to forget Him, there, of course, alarms and fears are not needless. We cannot then feel there is no danger. To be without Jesus in the storm is to be at the mercy of evil men and evil spirits. But what storm is there that will harm us if we are where Jesus has told us to go? If we be

followers of that which is good, we may be unhappy while God's hand is upon us, but we should enjoy inward peace if that hand is guiding us and with us.

And this was the lesson Peter learnt. His request to be bidden to come to Jesus on the water was a proof he believed in the possibility of his doing such a wonderful miracle. But was his motive pure? Did he want to show the power of God exemplified in his case as in his Master's? Or was there a mixed feeling of vain confidence, or, as we should say, a showing off before his fellows? We cannot say. But his faith failed. What with the darkness, the noise of the wind, the splashing of the waves, the losing sight of his Master's person, he failed, he sank, he thought he should be drowned; and the timely cry, 'Lord, save me, I perish!' brought his Lord's hand down to him at once, and the reproof, 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?'

We, too, should try and exercise faith when there is a call to do great things for others and for the glory of God. And if, like Peter, we find it harder than we thought and fail, only let us, like Peter, call upon that gracious living Friend; and though our weak faith calls for reproof, He will always stretch forth His hand and help us.

## XXXV.

### CURE FOR A WOUNDED SPIRIT.

‘And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit : I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord.

‘Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial : for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.

‘Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace : and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him.

‘And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.’

*1 Samuel i. 15-18.*

WE see here a blessed example of how a wounded spirit can be healed, a sorrowful soul made to become ‘no more sad.’

It is written for us ; it is intended that we should act in the same way when under at all like circumstances of sorrow. And who is without causes of grief at times ?

And if there was a balm of Gilead for every wounded spirit under the Old Covenant, how much more now for us, who have Jesus—which

is 'Christ,' *i.e.*, 'anointed'—to comfort all that mourn, and 'to give the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness'? Look at Hannah's case! What were the causes of her sorrow? 'The heart knoweth its own bitterness.' Her husband scarcely knew, so he asked, 'Hannah, why weepest thou? why eatest thou not? why is thy heart grieved?'

Observe this: as is the case with many of our sorrows, she had brought this on herself. She was one of two wives. This was contrary to God's laws, and where such breaches occur they always bring trouble and difficulty; and though not always in so many words condemned by God in the narrative, He shows how His laws can never be broken with impunity. The other wife became an adversary to her, 'provoking her sore for to make her fret.' She was hitherto barren; unlike Peninnah, she had not given birth to a child: she was thus excluded from the hope which so many mothers in Israel entertained, of being the mother or progenitor of the 'seed of the woman' who was to 'bruise the head of the serpent.' This trouble lasted for years. It was wearing her out; it was vexing her husband. At last she sought, and not in vain, the true remedy.

Mothers are often women of sorrowful spirits.

More or less, like Hannah, their griefs arise from circumstances in their family ; something wrong with their children, their husband. Often, as here, perhaps from their own fault, a child has been foolishly indulged, and, 'left to himself, bringeth the mother to shame.'

But the causes of sorrow in a family are manifold. It is well to remember that, even when chiefly or wholly our own making, the remedy is still at hand which Hannah found ; even if our own sins or folly be the cause, our merciful and faithful High Priest is both able and willing to help us. No rules are laid down hard and fast as to the nature or cause of the burdens He offers to bear for us. He says, 'Come unto Me ; I will give you rest.' He cares for His wayward children, and says, 'Cast your care on Me' ; He says, 'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you' (Isaiah lxvi. 13).

But be sure that, like Hannah, you do leave your burden with Him, and not carry it away from the throne of grace ; do not come and pray, and go away just as you came. Faith in a loving Father, faith in His promise to hear and help, faith that says all things are possible, and nothing too hard for the Lord—this is what you want to have ; and having it, you will rise from your knees with your countenance no more sad.

Then observe, too, how greatly we excel Hannah in the nature of the High Priest we have over the House of God. Eli quite mistook the poor worshipper. Seeing her lips move, and not understanding the inward struggle of a soul wrestling with the Unseen God, he thought this was due to excess of wine instead of the spirit of prayer.

Our High Priest makes no mistakes, never misunderstands what is passing within us, in spite of our feeble words, or even no words ; He reads the thoughts aright. 'The Spirit maketh intercession for the saints, and He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession according to the will of God.'

Oh, what a blessing to have this great and faithful, merciful Priest, so unlike any earthly priests ! They cannot always understand our feelings or sympathize with us ; they have no power, even where they have the will, to do more than tell us where to go for comfort ; they have no power to forgive, or to heal with their own hands a wounded spirit—they are human, erring, changing. But our Priest is infallible, unchangeable, almighty, 'able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him.'

To Him carry all cares, great and small ; to



Him pour out your heart ; on Him lay every burden, and leave it in His hands ; and let your countenance be no more sad, as His words sound in your ears : ‘ Go in peace ; the Lord grant you your petition.’

We bring dishonour on our Lord if we go on carrying ourselves those burdens which He offers to carry for us ; we seem to doubt His faithfulness, and His lovingkindness, and His power to do all things.

He does not like such doubts, such little faith. We must aim at being ‘ strong in faith,’ and so ‘ giving glory to God.’ He is still the God of consolation, the God of peace, the God of hope, and the God that ‘ comforteth those that are cast down.’ But the comfort, the peace, and the hope will come in His appointed way, and that is by calling on Him in the day of trouble, and pouring out our spirit before Him in fervent, persevering supplication, as did Hannah and others of His saints of old.

## XXXVI.

### THE PERPETUAL MEMORY OF HIS PRECIOUS DEATH.

‘For I have received of the Lord that which also I have delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread :

‘ And when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat : this is My body, which is broken for you : this do in remembrance of Me.

‘ After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament (or covenant) in My blood : this do ye, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me.

‘ For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show (or proclaim) the Lord’s death till He come.

‘ Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

‘ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.’

I *Corinthians* xi. 23-28.

THIS is the one passage in all the Epistles in which the subject of the Lord’s Supper is treated by an Apostle ; not that this shows it was felt to be of less importance in their minds than other subjects, but that, being an ordinance

observed by all Christians, there not unnaturally arose, among some of them, mistaken views and an improper way of observing it. To correct these the Apostle refers to it here, and repeats the manner of its original institution by the Lord.

So God overrules evil for good by giving us an inspired Apostle's view on the subject.

He says, 'I have received of the Lord that which I have delivered unto you.' Observe how he says he had a special revelation on the subject, at some time or other, from the Lord. This shows the great importance of the ordinance. He then goes on to say, 'The same night in which He was betrayed He took bread.'

The time of the institution is very necessary to be noted. 'The same night in which He was betrayed.' When betrayed He was delivered up into the hands of those who would kill Him. And our minds are at once carried back to the institution of the Passover. Our Lord, as we know, purposely chose the feast of the Passover as the time when He would suffer. For He was the fulfilment of that ordinance; being the 'Lamb without blemish,' the shedding of whose blood was to be the ransom of His people. So in Exodus we read: 'The congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.' They were to sprinkle the blood on the door-posts; they were

to eat it that night, and let nothing remain unto the morning. It was the same night that Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron in haste, and it was 'a night to be much observed unto the Lord for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.'

This, then, was the corresponding night when the true Lamb of God was being betrayed and handed over to be killed, and that night, therefore, the time when He enjoined on all His followers the ordinance to be observed in remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself. The bread first blessed by thanksgiving, then broken, then distributed, then taken and eaten, representing His Body broken for us; the wine taken in the same way after supper representing His Blood, to be sprinkled on our hearts. And these simple acts reproduced in all future ages, in remembrance of His acts for us; because 'as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come.'

This is rightly called the Lord's supper, because we discern the Lord's Body as represented by the bread broken for us by Him who says, 'I am the Bread of Life'; the wine representing the 'Blood which is the Life' poured out for us.

The Apostle then goes on to speak of the wrong way in which the Corinthians acted on these occasions. They made it a common feast, and met 'not to eat the Lord's supper, for in eating, everyone taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.' They did not discern the Lord's body as represented in the bread and wine. It was partaken of in an unworthy manner. They consequently incurred the displeasure of God, who visited them with judgments to correct them. Some were sickly, some were weak, and some died.

We may suppose then that this eating and drinking to excess brought its own punishment, and their unholy feast brought judgment instead of blessings.

Such an abuse of the Holy Feast is not likely to occur in these days. The ordinance as observed in the Church of England is surrounded with hallowing influences. All is done with reverence, with prayers and praises suitable to the occasion. And he who comes in a humble spirit, 'religiously and devoutly disposed,' and can really pray the prayers used in the Prayer-book, can be in no danger of eating and drinking unworthily.

But while we are in no danger of Corinthian

errors, there are some others in an opposite extreme, against which we have to be on our guard.

These are referred to in our Articles, and in the rubric of our Prayer-book. Thus in the 28th of our Articles, at the end of our Prayer-book, where the idea of a change in the substance of the bread and wine is condemned, it is added, 'The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped.'

Other errors are also referred to in the next two Articles.

You will also see these errors guarded against in a short rubric at the end of the Communion Service, where adoration of the elements is forbidden, for that 'the Sacramental Bread and Wine remain still in their very natural substances, and therefore may not be adored (for that were idolatry, to be abhorred of all faithful Christians); and the natural Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ are in Heaven, and not here; it being against the truth of Christ's natural Body to be at one time in more places than one.'

It may often be useful, in view of so many mistakes, to go back to the account of the first institution. Our Lord was in His human form at the table. The disciples could not possibly think there was any change in the bread and wine, or that the Lord meant more in the words used by Him, than that these represent My body and My blood, and represent the covenant by them made when I offer them on the cross. And afterwards they would more clearly see why these simple elements were to keep up a remembrance of their Lord, 'absent in body, but present in spirit.' He does not say 'This is My body which I now give to you,' but 'My body which is broken for you,' that is, on the cross. He does not say 'This cup contains My blood,' but is 'the covenant in My blood ; that is, made through the blood I shall shed on the cross for you.' The fact of breaking the bread before their eyes represented the bruising of His body. And hence ministers are to so break the bread on the table that the communicants may see, and remember the signification of the act, and partaking of it may testify of their remembrance of the act, with all its consequent blessings. Jesus is not known after the flesh. 'The flesh profiteth nothing.' Therefore a remembrance is needed.

Christ's bodily presence is not on earth; nor will be till He come. As regards that body, He says, 'Touch Me not.'

His spiritual presence we want, and have as we realize it by faithful communion with Him.

See how greatly mistaken they are who keep away from the Lord's table on the ground of unworthiness. A deep sense of our sinfulness, and therefore need of atonement, is the very ground of our acceptance. Peter, John, James, and Thomas were all alike unworthy in one sense. But they were asked, as we are, thus to commemorate that sacrifice by which alone we are worthy to gather crumbs under our Master's table, or to eat bread in the kingdom of heaven.

Nor should we forget that the Sacrament is especially intended to remind us of our oneness with our fellow-disciples, who thus jointly partake of the one Bread and the one Cup. 'We being many are one Bread and one Body.' We may not think only of ourselves in that ordinance. Part of the blessing to be looked for at the time is a renewal of our fellowship with one another in the acknowledgment of the one Blood that cleanses from unrighteousness, the one spirit of thankful love that unites us in love with the one common Lord and Saviour. We



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come in charity with all, we worship as equal sharers of guilt, but also equal partakers of the benefits of His Death and Passion, equal expectants of His coming again 'without sin unto salvation unto them that look for Him.' Thus coming to this holy feast, we shall get a blessing from fellowship with God in Christ and fellowship with one another.

## XXXVII.

### BUILDING ON A MOST HOLY FAITH.

‘But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

‘Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.’

*Jude 20, 21.*

THIS is one of those passages in Scripture that brings out very practically the all-important doctrine of the Trinity, and places before us at one view what is the distinctive work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost in our salvation. St. Jude writes, you see, of the love of God, the mercy or grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of prayer in the Holy Ghost.

There is another peculiarity in the passage. You will note how carefully St. Jude brings together in one view a combination of our own work and God’s work in the salvation of our souls. He speaks of Christians ‘building up themselves,’ and ‘keeping themselves in the

love of God.' Yet, in closing his letter, he commends them to the 'only wise God our Saviour,' as Him who is 'able to keep from falling,' and finally 'present faultless before His Presence.'

And this, you will find, is always the language of Scripture. We are told to 'work out our own salvation ;' but we are told in the same place, 'God worketh in us to will and to do of His good pleasure.' Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith. Faith is His gift. No man can come to Him except taught and drawn by the Father. Yet we are invited to come to Him, to abide in Him, to keep His commandments. We are not machines, but intelligent, reasonable creatures, and appealed to accordingly. If we come not, believe not, obey not, sin lieth at the door. If we come, if we believe, if we obey, we cannot but say, 'I am what I am by grace. I am His workmanship in Christ Jesus; without Him I can do nothing; not I, but Christ in me.' It sounds like contradiction ; but, practically, every child of God finds this is really the truth about his salvation.

We are here reminded ours is a most holy faith. The Holy Spirit inclines us to believe. The Holy Saviour is the Holy Object of faith ; and faith comes by hearing and believing the Holy Scriptures, written by inspiration of holy men.

But this faith needs growing and increasing, and this he calls 'building up.' Just as St. Peter says, 'Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge,' and so on. And so St. Paul writes to some of 'faith growing exceedingly.' The disciples of the Lord felt this need, and so made this prayer, 'Lord, increase our faith.' We may well do the same, seeing that our faith, especially at first, may be compared to a grain of mustard seed.

There is everything around us to conspire to make us unbelieving, full of doubts. All the world of sense is against faith, for faith is the evidence of things not seen. We should every day try and add some stones to this building up of our souls in a holy faith. 'Faith cometh by hearing, hearing by the Word of God.'

Take care that your foundation is well laid in a most holy faith, not in a merely intellectual apprehension, not in a mere formal assent to the Articles of your belief; but in spiritual discernment of spiritual things. Then see that as you read and hear all about Christ, His Person, His work, His promises, His love, these blessed truths become more and more realities to you, and you become 'rooted and grounded in the love of Christ.'

'Praying in the Holy Ghost.' This implies

that the Holy Spirit is asked to help our infirmities, to make intercession for us according to the mind and will of God (see Romans viii.). This means praying in spirit and in truth. Not long prayers or necessarily beautiful prayers out of a book, but real, hearty, earnest desires, poured out in secret to our Heavenly Father, feeling sure that He hears and will answer.

The Holy Ghost suggests to every reader of God's Word what to ask for, how to plead for it, and how to expect and wait for an answer.

This, too, is the way to 'keep ourselves in the love of God.' It is thus, by constantly holding communion with God, our love deepens. It casts out fear. The Holy Ghost sheds abroad in the heart this loving confidence, this spirit of adoption by which we cry to God as our Father, who pitieth His children. So we keep, or rather are kept, in the love of God, as it is written, 'Who can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus?'

Lastly, Hope springs up within us. We look for the final act of mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ 'unto eternal life.' We look for His promised return to receive us unto Himself, 'that where He is, there we may be also.' And 'unto them that look for Him, He will appear a second time without sin unto salvation.'

Let us aim at realizing this comforting exhortation of the Apostle. You will see it corresponds with all that is written in the other Epistles. It is faith, hope, and love. It is 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost.' This alone is to know God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent, so as to have eternal life. There are many in these days who are trying to get to heaven in other ways. There are those who think their own way of finding out God, and their own way of being good and doing good, will avail for salvation, and that they need not trouble to know those deep truths about God and the Son and the Holy Ghost. But remember, God prescribes His own appointed way of attaining to His righteousness and His holy habitation. This is what St. Jude is warning about here, when he thus writes, 'There will be mockers in the last time . . . who separate themselves, sensual, not having the Spirit. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.'

## XXXVIII.

### GIVING AND RECEIVING.

‘I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.’—*Acts xx. 35.*

‘But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

‘Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver.’

*2 Corinthians ix. 6, 7.*

I SUPPOSE there are not a great many Christians who have by experience proved the truth of our Lord’s words, which yet must be most true, viz., that there is really a greater happiness to be found in giving away to others than in receiving gifts for ourselves.

And the reason is not far to find. We are naturally selfish; we all seek our own, and the welfare of Number One before that of our neighbour.

The Apostle, therefore, found it expedient to give the Corinthian Christians some advice on the subject in this second Epistle.

He says he found many of the churches (that is, the little communities of Christians) in Macedonia very liberal, 'praying us,' he said, 'with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of ministering to the saints.' This, he says, was the effect of the 'grace of God' bestowed upon them. He calls it 'grace' several times, and traces it to its source, 'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.'

Thus he traces the virtue of an unselfish liberal spirit to its only true source: God's grace working in the heart producing conformity to Christ.

You will note this, because there is no doubt that you will sometimes find men who do not believe in or love Christ, who yet seem to be very kind-hearted and very generous. But you will find when such kind-heartedness is not connected with Christ's love to us, it is not so expansive as Christ's, and does not embrace all those objects of our sympathy and help which Christ's love does.



Christian love directs its efforts of help not only to those who are in poverty and distress from want of this world's goods, but towards those also who are destitute of spiritual blessings. This is the spirit and manner of Christ's love to us. He left heaven's glory and became a poor man, dependent on His fellow-men, that we thereby might become rich in heaven's best blessings, rich in spiritual blessings, and rich in heaven's glory, and also rich in good works of the same kind.

Of course, true charity begins at home. So a brother or a sister destitute of food or clothing has our first claim. But it is not Christlike if it stops there. If we ourselves have been through grace made 'rich' in the best and truest sense, we shall assuredly feel compassion for those who are poor and destitute, because without those best riches we are taught that a person may say, 'I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,' and yet be 'wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked,' because they have no knowledge of Christ as the Pearl of Great Price, of the wedding garment to cover spiritual shame, of the oil of grace to enlighten, and of any title to the true riches of glory in the next world.

True grace will move our hearts with com-

passion towards those who are as sheep without a shepherd, wherever they are, as Christ's love to us has a breadth, a length, a height, and a depth, which we cannot measure.

Observe next how the Apostle dwells much on our gifts being cheerfully bestowed, 'not grudgingly or of necessity. God loveth a cheerful giver.'

And why does God only like, and like best, what comes from a willing heart? Because He wants it as a proof of love, and not from the worldly, selfish motive to get a return for it; but that our love may be Christlike, freely giving even to the unworthy. Therefore it is said, First give yourself to God, then your substance. He wants it not on His own account, but ours. He could send angels to supply wants, to visit sick, to relieve sufferers, to preach to the heathen; but He chooses to do all this through the instrumentality of human beings who receive commands thus to act as His servants. God tests our faithfulness in our possession of the unrighteous mammon, that He may see who to reward hereafter with the endowments and trusts of true riches in the next world.

He would have us here act as stewards of all we have for His sake, and, as servants, come to consider how our Master would have us dis-

pense His gifts, not for our own benefit, but in His service. When the Tabernacle had to be built the people brought voluntary gifts of every kind according to their possessions. God accepted them, and the work was soon completed. God is building a glorious temple now. Ministering to the saints is adding to the building. Every man should help according to his means, willingly, because he is intensely interested and concerned in the work. A very little given willingly is much more acceptable than a larger gift drawn out by much pleading.

But note also : willing, cheerful giving is the result of a firm persuasion that nothing given is really lost. It is a loan repaid with interest. It is not only love that is proved, but faith in God's power and love to supply and make up for all that is parted with.

The widow gave willingly, and God saw it and it pleased Him. She must have had wonderful faith to believe that parting with the whole, and not half, she had, she should yet find God would not let her be a loser.

We are not to give with a view to receive again ; yet with the feeling we shall suffer no real loss eventually. Without this feeling it is not easy to give willingly what we may really want

for ourselves. But once let there be the feeling, The Lord hath need of it; the Lord wants this; my poor brother must have his wants supplied; I have the power to help—then we should respond willingly, lovingly, because with the assurance God will see that we are no real losers in the end. ‘He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord: and look, whatsoever he layeth out, it shall be paid him again.’ ‘Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.’

We all know what great inequality there is in the possession of the good things of this world. Some very rich indeed, some very poor. And God does not expect much where there is but little to give. We are especially told, if there be first a willing mind it is accepted ‘according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.’ But all, whether rich or poor, are asked to prove their love in this particular way; for we are all only made rich in grace through the poverty of Christ for us. I think the poor are, as a rule, far more ready to respond to these calls than are those who have great possessions; for there are many causes pleaded to which, if rich people gave according to their riches, and as the poor do out of their poverty, the funds of such societies would be far in excess of what they are.

We must try and rise to the feeling that all we have is God's; we are but His trustees, and it is not only a duty to acknowledge it, but a great privilege to minister to those whom Christ calls His brethren.

'Honour the Lord therefore with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase.' 'God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love which ye have showed toward His Name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and yet do minister.'

## XXXIX.

### SUNDAY.

‘Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.’—*Exodus* xx. 8.

‘If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day ; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable ; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words : then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord ; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father : for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.’—*Isaiah* lviii. 13.

THE Sabbath was made for man. It dates from the creation. The division of time into weeks was thus marked off by this day being different from other days, a day of rest. It was to keep up a remembrance of the great fact that our Creator claims a portion of our time for Himself specially. When He placed man on earth and told him to work, He seemed to say, ‘Work for yourself six days, then rest, and be like Me, who, when I finished My work of creation, rested.’ And when men were in danger of forgetting this and other laws, the commandment was renewed and

placed in the middle of the others, 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.'

God never knew weariness from His work; But God knew that man would, for He knew the requirements of the man He made, and that his body and mind would be sorely taxed under the curse of toiling for his bread with the sweat of his brow. It was, therefore, a merciful consideration for the wants of all His creatures.

God knew, too, the tendency in man's evil nature to forget and even to deny his Maker, and to worship the creature, and therefore He gave an ordinance to keep this great truth before mankind's mind, that He made all things in heaven and earth. They did not come by chance. They did not make themselves. He knew there would be the 'fool' who would say so. Therefore He says, 'Remember the Sabbath day; a day of rest to the Creator, a day of rest for man.'

This rest is called 'God's rest.' As it was said, 'They shall not enter into MY rest.' And again, 'A promise is left us of entering into HIS rest.'

The Israelites could not enter into their rest because of unbelief. But 'we which have believed do enter into rest.' The Greek word is 'Sabbatism.' God is, as it were, enjoying His

rest. We who believe in Christ, and come to Him and find rest, are being sharers of God's rest. And in this sense every day of true Christian life is rest, or 'Sabbath'; and when the Christian ceases from all his works and labour of life on earth, he enters upon his eternal rest completely and entirely.

But this does not do away with the necessity or the privilege of remembering one day in the week as belonging more especially to God. It is one of the Ten Commandments, and is as binding on the Christian as the other nine. Christ came not to do away with, but to fulfil the law; and as love fulfils the others, so it does this. The manner of keeping it is altered, and the day is altered. But the spirit of the law remains, and fresh reasons and motives are added.

There is no penalty now for a breach of the law by doing work, as there was in the wilderness, when a man was stoned for picking up sticks to light a fire.

We are freed from such bondage to the letter of the law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ). We keep it holy, and count it God's day, as the others are for our daily toil for our own and others' support.

Its advantages for the human frame are as



great as ever. The blessings for the spirit are needed as much as ever.

It is a witness now, as of old, that we, 'through faith, understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God.' But it is also a witness that we believe that 'all things were made by the Living Word, and without Him was not anything made that was made.'

The change from the last day to the first adds to what we commemorate, and also to the reason for doing so. It is the memory of the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

When Israel was redeemed from Egyptian slavery, this was added to the reason for remembering the Sabbath day. So Moses writes, 'Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it . . . and remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought thee out with a mighty hand ; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day.'

So when the disciples transferred their allegiance from the letter of the law under Moses to the spirit of the law under Christ, they kept the memory of their deliverance from the devil and from death by observing the first day to keep it holy.

From that day to this it has been so observed by all Christian people.

To any who forget this, we may well say, 'Will a man rob God?' Yet many do, and thereby lose great blessings for themselves, and help forward the forgetfulness of God by His own creatures, and by those that are His by redemption.

It is vain to plead the inability to spare the time from the needful toils for a livelihood. God, who asks for this day, and gives six for labour, knows what He asks for, and would never let anyone suffer for giving Him what He asks.

The soul has wants as well as the body. The care of that is 'the one thing needful.'

The Sunday—with its open churches, schools for learners and teachers, and the blessed words of life in our hands, the prayers and the praises which ascend like incense on this day throughout the land—is, or should be, above all other days, a happy day, a cheerful day, a refreshing day, a useful day, and helpful to every pilgrim in his journey home.

There is liberty in the observance, if only the rule be kept in mind, 'Keep it holy.' Rob not God of it. Use not your liberty as an occasion to serve the flesh, but to serve the spirit.

In the way of observance, we may well follow

St. Paul's maxim—'All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient.'

There are many things I could do with a clear conscience on the Sunday, but I feel it is not expedient to do them, having a view to the good of others, or may be my own spirit.

There is a tendency in the present day to a very lax observance of the Sunday, and to use it all for man's own pleasure.

It is so used on the Continent, as any traveller there well knows. If I regard this as a great evil to a nation's religion as well as the individual's, I shall do my best not to countenance anything that would help that tendency. I would therefore refrain from many things which would otherwise be harmless, lest I make my brother to offend.

If the day is a day of pleasure chiefly, and all the sources of amusement are opened to the public, it entails the service and labour of a great many, while it encourages the world to forget altogether that it is God's day.

A little self-denial for the sake of others is expedient, therefore, and not so very much to give, in return for the blessings promised.

We should pray ever to be like St. John, 'in the Spirit on the Lord's day.' We shall then find He lets us hear His voice speaking words

of peace and comfort. We shall, like Jacob, say, 'This is none other than the gate of Heaven.' He will meet us and bless us. We shall go on our way rejoicing. 'It is the day the Lord hath made ; we will rejoice and be glad in it.' Most true are the words of Sir Matthew Hale :

' A Sabbath well spent  
Brings a week of content.'

## XL.

### THE MANNER OF SOME IN RESPECT OF CHURCH-GOING.

‘Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is ; but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.’—*Hebrews* x. 25.

CHRISTIANS have been accustomed to meet together for worship from the beginning. So we find in all accounts of the doings of Christians, both in the Sacred writings as well as in the writings of those who lived after the times of the Apostles. Man cannot do without social gatherings for business and for pleasure, and Christians cannot do without social gatherings for worship. God’s promises of blessings in answer to prayer are given not only to private prayer but to assemblies of saints, small though at times they may be, even two or three.

In the early days after man’s creation this was found a necessity and a privilege. ‘Then men began to call on the name of the Lord’—that is, unitedly.

The most suitable seasons for such assemblies have always been the one day in seven claimed by God as His day.

Our Lord always attended the synagogue worship on the Sabbath day. 'As His custom was,' we read in St. Luke, chap. iv.

In St. Paul's missionary work, he found it always a great opportunity to preach Christ in the synagogue on the Sabbath day.

The very meaning of synagogue is 'assembly,' and in every synagogue Moses and the Prophets were read every Sabbath day, as they are to this day among the Jews.

The first day of the week soon became the great day for these assemblies among the first Christians, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles and after-writers. Disciples came together to break bread, to worship, to read God's Word, and to preach on it.

Such opportunities are useful and profitable to refresh the minds that are all the week engaged in this world's work and toil.

They are stepping-stones towards the great congregation of the righteous in the future great day of the Lord. They help to keep the saints in communion with one another, as well as in communion with their common Lord and Saviour.

Can we do without them? Can it be right to neglect them? Is it good for ourselves? Is it kind to our brother?

The habit of neglecting these opportunities is as old as the habit of using them. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews refers to some in his early days who did forsake these meetings. Let it not be so, he says, with you: 'Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is.'

We all know this is the manner of some in our day. Some go nowhere on Sunday. Some forsake in part, and not wholly, such gatherings. They are great losers. Wherever God offers to meet us and bless us, and we do not go to meet Him, be sure we lose a blessing.

Trifling reasons keep some away. They do not like their pew or the sitting. They have been offended with the minister, or with someone in the church, or they see many go who are none the better for it. All sorts of reasons are given to satisfy men's consciences while they neglect these precious opportunities of getting good to their own souls and helping their neighbours to get good also.

Will not some among us be sorry when all these opportunities are gone by, and they have neglected or undervalued them? Time is short. We are fast

hastening to the great day of assembling before the Throne of Judgment. How will it be with you if you have not been found in the company of saints on earth? Will there be a place for you there among them? Would you like to be classed among those of whom it is written, 'The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous'? (Psalm i.).

Time is short. Only once a week Sunday comes. And yours may be but a few more in number, for life is uncertain.

Surely, if we are only wise, we shall consider these things in view of our latter end. Certainly, if we have 'tasted that the Lord is gracious,' we shall want all the help we can get to enable us to 'grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ.'

If any have for years neglected these assemblies, even now it is not too late to begin. Let not the fear of man deter them. The laughter or the frown of man is nothing compared to the wrath of God or the peace of mind which He gives. Many have wrong motives constraining them to attend church. But that is no reason for your doing wrong to your own soul. Parents who never frequent the house of prayer cannot expect their children to keep up the habit when they are separated from them in after-life.



If we are found at social gatherings of friends and parties of pleasure, and yet never known to join the assemblies of worshippers, the conclusion is inevitable. We say plainly we find more pleasure in friends' company than we do in the worship of God, the communion of saints, the promised presence of Christ, and the words of life.

'I speak as to wise men ; judge ye what I say.' Think not only of your own good, but of all whom your example and influence reach. ' Let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and good works. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is ; but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.'

## XLI.

### SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

‘The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired Him that He would show them a sign from heaven.

‘He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather : for the sky is red.

‘And in the morning, It will be foul weather to-day : for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky ; but can ye not discern the signs of the times ?

‘A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign ; and there shall no sign be given unto it ; but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And He left them, and departed.’

*St. Matthew xvi. 1-4.*

OUR Lord greatly blamed those who did not observe the signs of the times at the period of His presence on earth. He said they were hypocrites. This plainly implies that this non-observance was due to a sinful state of heart. They ought to have observed them, and if they had they would have discerned His character, His object, His work, and have seen the things that belonged to their peace.

Our Lord proved their guilt in this way : He said, You watch the weather. You notice the

way of the wind, the clouds in the sky, and you form your opinion of the weather accordingly. You watch these things in the evening, and you foresee what sort of weather there will be next day. You observe the sky at sunrise, and accordingly judge whether it will rain or be a fine day, and prepare to act accordingly.

All this was very natural, and not in any way wrong. But how was it they did not observe the signs that were taking place around them, and which portended far more important events, and which were connected with their eternal welfare?

The answer was this: They were interested in the matter of the weather. They did not feel equal interest in the things that concerned their spiritual welfare.

They took care to pay great attention to those things which would affect their worldly concerns, and so formed a correct opinion about them. They did not pay great attention to the writings of Moses or the Prophets, nor did they observe in a right spirit the teaching, the example, and the miracles of Jesus, and so formed an incorrect view of Him. There was sin here, and when they asked for another sign from Him, He said they had enough, and no more should be given them until He should

rise again and so be a sign and a wonder as Jonah was, when he rose out of the depths of the sea and preached to the Ninevites. So they were a wicked and an adulterous generation. Their hearts were divorced from God, and they were found to be hypocrites by their very request for more signs than they had before their eyes.

Does not all this bear equally on many professors of religion in our day?

There are many nowadays who say they want more signs from heaven to prove that Christianity is true, that the Bible is God's book, and all its miracles true, and that the doctrines of the New Testament are what they profess to be—the 'power of God unto salvation.'

May it not be that many of these could be shown to be guilty in the same way that our Lord convicted the Jews of hypocrisy? There never was a time in the history of mankind, perhaps, when more attention was given, every day of the week, to the signs of the sky and the forecasts of the weather.

Those who read the daily papers can see how in most of them there are forecasts of the weather. So that we are forewarned as to the coming of storms or the prospect of fine weather. Besides which it is the daily topic of conver-

sation among all classes. What the weather is at distant points of Ireland or America, and, in fact, far and wide across the seas, north and south, east and west—all this is daily most carefully registered, and is telegraphed across sea and land to be published in the papers.

The reasons are plain. Sailors need to be forewarned in putting out to sea, and farmers at home like to know the state of the barometer; plans for labour or for pleasure are influenced by these signs of good or bad weather. All this is useful and interesting; but it is a parable. For, after all, what are these things compared with our eternal interests, concerning which certainly we are not left without many signs and tokens by which to be guided?

The signs of weather to which our Lord refers are of two kinds—either of foul or of fair weather. A fearful storm was impending over the whole Jewish nation at that time—a storm by which their city would be destroyed, the inhabitants slaughtered or taken captive, their beautiful Temple laid in ruins, and not one stone left on another.

But a glorious sunshine was also the forecast. There was One standing among them who could and would heal their souls. They could flee to Him, and be safe from the storm; they

could come to Him and find rest for their souls ; and they could bask in the sunshine of a Redeemer's love, which was, as it were, a foretaste of a summer of glory in the kingdom of heaven. But they knew not the day of their visitation.

If we are as observant as we should be, we may see signs and tokens of God's purposes, both of judgment against unrighteousness and of blessings of mercy and grace for sinners who are fleeing from the wrath to come.

As with the Jews, so before our eyes there are the unmistakable signs of fulfilled prophecy. We, like them, may see in Jesus the Lamb of God that taketh away sin—the work of the Holy Spirit in men's hearts changing them.

We can see the most undeniable proofs that Jesus is still working wonders around us. As sin is crucified, dead souls are quickened into a new life of holiness, and belief in a risen and ascended Saviour fills hearts with joy and peace, and hope of a future glorious resurrection.

These are sufficient signs, because traceable to no other source than the truth of God's Word.

There are many signs around us of the fulfilment of Scripture forecasts—some accomplished, some in course of fulfilment.

All that has taken place in the history of

Christendom, as the persecution of the saints; the hatred of men towards Christ and His servants; the questioning of the scoffer—‘Where is the promise of His coming?’—the abounding of iniquity; the love of many waxing cold; the dispersion of the Jews in all countries, while their once fertile land lies desolate, enjoying the Sabbath they denied it; the spread of the Gospel by its being published among all nations as a witness—these and other such-like events are signs that Christ was a true Prophet, that His works as Priest, Prophet, and King are being carried on, and that these are the latter times—the last dispensation before Christ comes. Thus it is our own fault if we do not observe these signs and the days of our visitation.

Let us take heed that this charge be not laid at our door. Unbelief in the signs God gives us is a greater sin than we are apt to think it; it is an evil heart of unbelief that departs from the living God, and yet tries to comfort conscience with the plea of insufficient evidence. Let the heart be but bent on doing His will, let there be an honest searching of the Scriptures, let there be prayer for that spirit of discernment which God says is necessary for discerning spiritual things, and the truth will make us free—free in the glorious liberty of the children of God; free

from the sin of hypocrisy, from the bondage of superstition; free in the enjoyment of the free and loving service of Christ, who hath made us free for time and for eternity.



## XLII.

### HELP FOR THE TEMPTED.

‘For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels ; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham.’

‘For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

‘Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.’

*Hebrews ii. 16 ; iv. 15, 16.*

WE are inclined at times to think that to our Lord temptations were no great trials—being the Son of God, it was easy to him to resist ; so that, in fact, when the devil came and found nothing in Him, it is implied that it was an easy matter, and cost our Lord no effort to resist the Evil One’s suggestions. This is a wrong idea, and we are not getting all the good we might when we so think of Jesus being tempted.

We have to think of Him as real man, with human feelings and desires and tastes, only excluding any idea of sinful desires which come from without or spring from within. ‘Tempted

like as we are in all points, only without sin.' And so it is said, 'It behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, and to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.'

There would have been no suffering if the temptations had not been very real. There would have been no strong crying and tears and wrestling in prayer and supplication if temptation had not been a most terrible and very strong force brought to bear upon His mind.

The devil is a real Being, and had a special object in tempting Christ, as he has now in tempting God's children. God, who is the 'stronger,' has wise reasons for permitting this, and He has also purposes answered in those temptations and their results.

The temptations of our Lord in the wilderness before He began His ministry help us to see these objects. It was Satan's great opportunity; the greatest, after the first temptation of man in Eden. He knew the object for which Christ had come from heaven to earth clothed in our nature.

The devil is not omniscient; but he knows

what God has spoken by His servants. He knew Christ was the Lord from heaven, by whom his own head was to be bruised; and if he did not think he could bruise the head, he thought, doubtless, he could the heel of the seed of the woman. He had succeeded in the temptation of the first Adam; he would try what he could do on 'the last Adam, the Lord from heaven.'

There was no weak point in Christ as there is always in man, where Satan's darts could find entrance. But there was the weakness of exhausted human nature after prolonged fasting. Hence his first plan, asking Christ to work a miracle on the stones to satisfy His hunger with bread. He knew also that Christ was going to display His miraculous power in divers ways. He asked Him to display that power by a miraculous leap from the pinnacle of the Temple, asking Him to feel assured from Scripture God's angels would guard Him from harm. He knew God had foretold He would set Him on the throne of His father David, and give Him the heathen for His inheritance. It was a real temptation to offer Him all this glory without any sufferings previously, on one simple condition, the bowing down before him in acknowledgment of his, the devil's, great power.

All these, you see, were temptations peculiar to Christ, as the Christ, the Son of God. If one was yielded to, the others would have followed. If one was yielded to only for a moment, Satan's object would have been accomplished. Man's redemption would have been stayed; man's ruin complete. But it could not be; Satan was foiled, and left Him for the time, to come again when another opportunity should occur, as it did in the garden of Gethsemane.

See then, next, God's purpose in permitting the tempter thus to come and try.

It was that angels and principalities, and all in heaven and all on earth, should know that no weapon against His Christ should prevail. He would set His holy One upon His holy hill of Sion. The gates of hell could not prevail. Christ was proved to be the Stronger One; and being Himself proved to be the Conqueror, the Captain of Salvation, all His purposes should stand, and Jesus would be 'able to save to the uttermost all that should come unto God by Him.'

Was it not also intended to teach us that fighting under our Great Captain, and fighting in His strength, we must use the same arms and armour that Christ did? Christ's weapon was the sword of the Spirit, which is

the Word of God. 'IT IS WRITTEN.' Here was also the Shield of Faith.

How remarkably did our Lord on all occasions appeal to the Scriptures! His ground for action was that the Scriptures should be fulfilled. The Scriptures, He said, cannot be broken. To each temptation His simple reply was, 'It is written.' What a proof that He fought as man, and that we, too, must contend and overcome by our faith in God's Word!

There is no temptation but what it may be met by faith in God's written promises or declarations in Scripture. Being well-read in the Bible makes the strong man.

Being strongly impressed with all that God's Word tells us all about His will is the way to be strong in the Lord and the power of His might. 'Not knowing the Scriptures' is where Satan gets advantage; we are then ignorant of his devices. A text that comes readily to hand as we go forth each day and mingle with the ungodly is the only way to be safe in the midst of temptations.

Be well up in Scripture. Let it speak to you with the authority of 'thus saith the Lord,' and 'thus it is written,' and the devil will find no opening in your armour. Have the Lord on your side, and, like Peter, your faith will not

fail. 'If God be for us, who can be against us?' and who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good? 'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.' And when he comes again, let him ever find you still encased in the whole armour of God. The promise still holds good, 'He will with the temptation make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.' Jesus is still able and willing to stand by all His disciples and to pray for them, that they may not fail in their faith or be led captive by the Evil One.

### XLIII.

## THE CHILDREN'S BREAD AND THE DOGS' CRUMBS.

'The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation ; and she besought Him that He would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.

'But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled : for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs.

'And she answered and said unto Him, Yes, Lord : yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs.'

*St. Mark vii. 26-28.*

THE Jews looked on the Gentiles in the light of dogs ; that is, they considered them as far below themselves in respect of the privileges and blessings which they inherited as a favoured nation and people ; they were outside the covenant which God made with Abraham and his descendants according to the flesh.

Hence their anger when our Lord referred to them as recipients of blessings, as in the case of Naaman the Syrian and the widow of Sidon ; hence their slowness to believe any good could

be found in a Samaritan or could come out of Galilee. And afterwards, when St. Paul spoke of preaching to the Gentiles, they said, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth; he is not fit to live.'

When the Syrophenician woman applied to Christ for mercy for her daughter, Jesus, for some reasons, assumed the language of a Jew of His day. He said she was asking for what belonged to the Jews and the lost sheep of the House of Israel. The answer of the woman showed her humility in accepting her position as a Gentile, but also her faith in the love and justice of the Saviour in not forbidding the dogs to pick up the crumbs which the Jews were despising. Her faith gained what she asked for. Though an Israelite, Jesus had a large heart, and was no respecter of persons. He well knew the day was not far off when His servants would carry the Bread of Life to the Gentiles, and the Gospel feast which the Jews were refusing would find many guests among the Gentiles.

This may well remind us of the claims and calls of those heathen who, like the Gentiles of those days, are outside of, and far away from, Christian privileges and blessings.

As the Jews of our Lord's days were jealous of any of their privileges going from them to



the Gentiles, so now too often we find a narrow and selfish spirit among professing Christians, who care not to hear of money spent to carry Gospel blessings to the heathen. Some there are—we trust not quite so many as there used to be—who, when asked to help the missionary work, reply, 'We have heathen at home; let us attend to their wants'; let the children first be filled. Yes; but how about the crumbs? Surely we have our table loaded with Gospel blessings; surely we can spare something for the poor heathen who happen to be without them!

It is cold-hearted logic which argues that because in our own country there are still thousands in ignorance and darkness, we are to let the millions and millions across the seas remain untaught and unenlightened.

If, as it is said, we are to wait till all our own people are satiated with the good things of the Gospel, the heathen will never get a crumb from our table. If the first Christians had acted on this rule, Great Britain had never been evangelized by those who came across the waters to bring light and truth.

We are like the rich man clothed in purple and faring sumptuously every day. The heathen are like the beggar at our doors, desiring to be

fed with the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table. The dogs come and lick the beggar's sores. They are not only starving for want of the Bread of Life, but they have 'wounds and bruises and putrefying sores,' inflicted and caused by sin. Their superstitious customs and false religions are, like the tongues of the dogs, applied to the sores: they give them no comfort; they produce no healing.

But, thanks be to God! in these latter times the rich country is awaking to a sense of its duty to the impoverished and perishing ones at our door; the spirit of a loving Saviour, who extended mercy to the poor woman who pleaded for the crumbs, is actuating many in our day. More servants than ever before are now sent forth with free invitations to the Gospel feast.

There is more of that true charity which, while it begins at home, is not quenched by great seas between us and our brethren in India, Africa, or Asia.

None but the very selfish are afraid of parting with money for this purpose, knowing that in the end it all comes back again in spiritual and eternal blessings.

It seems strange that for so many centuries a professing Christian people should have lost sight of this duty. But such is one side of

human nature ; and we still find some hearts unchanged, and closed against all appeals for light and truth to be sent to foreign parts. 'Out of sight, out of mind.' Excuses are soon found good enough to slack the hand of the giver : 'We know not how the money goes;' or, 'Too much is spent in the machinery of missions;' or, 'We do not see results enough.' Such-like excuses are still at times heard, but not among the true disciples of Jesus, who have His spirit, His love : 'Freely they have received, freely they give.'

We are debtors to the heathen ; we daily feed upon the good things which come to us from India, China, and elsewhere. They minister to us in carnal things. It is but fair and just to give them a little taste of the good things of the world to come. We have for many centuries carried in our ships the merchandise of this world to them, and they have often asked, 'Where is your religion? where is your God?' They do not conceal their false religion ; it meets us at every turn. They look often in vain for any signs of what we worship, what we believe in ; yet we profess to have the one only Name given whereby man can be saved. Their religions are cruel and unfeeling, and have no healing power in them. We have taught them to

swear and to drink ; we have sold them deadly poisons and weapons for warfare. But, alas ! as yet scarcely one Bible, the Book of Life, for each thousand, scarcely one preacher for each half-million.

But let not this be laid at our door any longer—as far as we individually are concerned. If ever we pray for ourselves and friends, let us add always a petition that the great Lord of the harvest would send out more labourers. Let us, at least, do our part to help those that are willing to go forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles ; let us feel sure it is a mighty privilege to be fellow-workers with all good men and with the great Master Himself, unto the kingdom of God.

## XLIV.

### RESTORATION OF ISRAEL.

‘It shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set His hand a second time to recover the remnant of His people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.

‘And He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.’

*Isaiah xi. 11, 12.*

‘For I will set Mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land : and I will build them, and not pull them down ; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up.

‘And I will give them an heart to know Me, that I am the Lord ; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God : for they shall return unto Me with their whole heart.

*Jeremiah xxiv. 6, 7.*

No one can doubt that in the latter days the Jews are to be restored as a nation to their land. It is not easy to read the Prophets and believe the gifts and calling of God are without repentance—*i.e.*, change of mind—and yet to feel any doubt on this matter. ‘I the Lord change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.’ The bush on fire but not burned is a type of this fact.

The Jews are the only people on earth of whom it can be said that after more than 3,000 years, after being driven out of their own territory, after centuries of persecution, they still remain a distinct people and nation. There is no nation or country on the face of the globe where some of them are not found, and wherever they are found a Jew retains his distinct nationality. And all Jews have this expectation and hope, that in the latter days they will be restored to the land which they were wont to inhabit. They were driven out for their sins, and their land is enjoying that Sabbath they refused to give it when living in it. But we believe the promise that after repentance they will be permitted to return.

So it is written in their law, 'If they shall confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers . . . if their hearts be humbled and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity, then will I remember My covenant with Abraham . . . and I will remember the land.'

And again, 'And it shall come to pass when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God,

and shalt obey His voice . . . with all thy heart, and with all thy soul ; that then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion on thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee ' (see Lev. xxvi. and Deut. xxx.).

The promises to this effect are too numerous even to refer to here. The Prophets are full of them—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and others ; and the Apostle to the Romans bears this testimony, ' That blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved : as it is written, There shall come out of Sion a Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob : for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins . . . for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance ' (chap. xi.).

You will observe the immense importance of this belief in the restoration of Israel. Some might say, ' What does it signify ? ' But it does a great deal, because on it depends the faithfulness of God to keep His covenant.

Some are apt to think that as now, in respect of spiritual blessings, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, they are both one in Christ, so the promises to the people as a

nation are receiving their accomplishment in the salvation of all believers in Christ, whether Christian or converted Jew. But this is to forget the distinct promises given to the descendants of Abraham, of national glory in their own land. We must not apply the curses by which they are dispersed among nations as a distinct people, and then refuse them the blessings promised to them in their own land.

See, for instance, how these promises are said to be as sure to them as the very existence of ordinances of heaven. 'Thus saith the Lord that giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar : the Lord of hosts is His name. If those ordinances depart from before Me, saith the Lord, then shall the seed of Israel also cease from being a nation before Me for ever.' And then, that this is not merely spiritual blessings is plain, when it is added, 'The city shall be built to the Lord' (Jer. xxxii.). And if we say, 'How can these things be?' What can ever draw together all these scattered tribes of the sons of Israel? How can they all be brought to live again in the land of Palestine? and how can their city and their temple ever be rebuilt and they become a great nation? we can only



reply, 'All things are possible to God.' This difficulty has been long ago anticipated in the writings of the Prophets. The vision of Ezekiel (xxxvii.) was for this purpose. Seeing many very dry bones in a large valley, he is asked, 'Can these bones live?' He did not answer 'No,' but, 'O Lord, Thou knowest.' He is told to preach to the bones. He did not reply, 'It is no use,' but said, 'O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones, Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and ye shall live.' As he prophesied, bone came to bone, flesh and sinews came upon them. And on again prophesying, 'breath came into them, and they lived and stood up on their feet an exceeding great army.'

The interpretation was, 'These bones are the whole house of Israel.' And the prophet declares further, 'They shall live when God's Spirit enters them, and they shall be placed in their own land.'

And if we ask why the Lord will do this great thing, we reply, 'In order first to show He has kept His covenant, and faithfully will perform it even to the letter; and next, that He has further purposes, it would seem, to be accomplished by the restored and converted house of Israel, which will affect the whole world.'

‘In those days Israel shall blossom and bud, and they shall fill the face of the world with fruit.’ And, again (Zechariah), ‘It shall come to pass that as ye were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing. . . . Yea, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to intreat the favour of the Lord.’

Thus, then, we see that though of all other nations God makes an end, of this one it is said, ‘I will not make a full end, but correct in measure.’

And in those days will be seen the answer to the last question of the disciples to Jesus before He left them, ‘Wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ The Lord’s reply had reference to the time only of the restoration. The fact He did not deny; for the prayer is still to be answered, ‘Thy kingdom come.’ In the present dispensation the Gentiles are not likely fully to accomplish this; but only a certain portion of them are brought under the Gospel influence. God is taking out from among them a people. But we are led to expect in the last days a great falling away, as there was with Israel. But when the veil is taken from the eyes of the Jews, and when,

turning to the Lord, they go to Sion and look up to Him whom they have pierced, and the spirit of grace and supplication has been poured upon them—then the ‘Deliverer shall appear in Sion, and righteousness shall go forth out of Jerusalem, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth, and the Gentiles shall see Thy righteousness, and all kings Thy glory.’ And so will, at last, all the families of the earth be blessed in the seed of Abraham, and in God’s good time the ‘knowledge of the Lord cover the whole earth,’ and the ‘Lord be king over all the earth.’

Pray we thus for the peace of Jerusalem, and God’s ancient people, for in their peace shall the whole world enjoy peace. ‘If the casting away of them is the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?’

Nor let us forget how much we owe to the Jews. The Scriptures were all written by Jews for Jews. Our Lord was a Jew. The great Apostle of the Gentiles was a Jew. Their debtors we are; and though for the time, as a nation, they are cast off, ‘God hath not cast away His people whom He foreknew.’ At this present time ‘there is a remnant, according to the election of grace.’ Bear in mind that ‘blind-

ness in part (only) hath happened to Israel, till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, and so all Israel shall be saved.'

We owe it to the Jews to make special efforts to bring the light of truth before this remnant. These efforts are made by some, and constant conversions are taking place; and if Christians are faithful to this duty, it may be, a large number will one day become obedient to the faith, and thereby will begin the great work of the restoration of Israel, the return from the Captivity, the 'gathering in a second time' from all lands, and the beginning of the blessed day the whole creation awaits, 'the time of the restitution of all things, spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets.'

## XLV.

# THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD AND OF THE CHURCH.

### I.

‘The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass ; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John :

‘Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that He saw.

‘Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein : for the time is at hand.’

*Revelation i. 1-3.*

BIBLE-READERS are too apt to leave the last book of the Bible alone. They think it too hard to understand.

The words at the head of this address show that that is wrong. We should not be promised a blessing on its study if no good were to be got from it. It cannot be denied there are in it many things to which St. Peter refers as ‘things hard to be understood.’ The highly figurative language in which these things are revealed, the mysterious emblems and figures

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under which these things were shown to St. John, and the fact that all prophecy before accomplishment is in its very nature difficult to interpret—all combine to make the book very difficult to understand, and to see the meaning of a great part of the things which are therein foretold.

But this would not justify our making it an exception to other parts of the Bible, of which we have the command, 'Search the Scriptures; they are they which testify of Me.' 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' Besides which, the first few chapters are not hard to understand. After a description of Jesus the Lord, as He appeared in vision to John in the Isle of Patmos, there are the Epistles which the Lord sent through him to the seven Churches in Asia. These, like the Epistles of the Apostles, are not hard to understand, and contain many important passages which we should apply to ourselves. There are great and precious promises, there are solemn warnings which have an immediate application to Churches and to members of the Churches of the present day. And in each one it is written, 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.' We, therefore, may surely get the blessing that comes from hearing and keeping these sayings.

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Remember, too, if we cannot arrive at the certain meaning of many of the things couched under strange and mysterious figures, it is no reason for not trying to understand them, and no reason why some should not be comparatively easy to interpret, especially if we take the trouble to compare these with other prophecies of the Old Testament, never neglecting to ask for wisdom from above.

The prophecies of the Old Testament which foretold of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow were to the majority of people wholly unintelligible; but to some, who read and tried to understand, they were as a light shining in a dark place; and when the Lord did come, and did suffer, and did enter into glory, and did pour down riches of grace and glory, these people were prepared for these things, and were confirmed in their faith when they saw them come to pass.

So now if we read the prophecies concerning the future of the Church and of the world, we shall be, at any rate, observers of the signs of the times, and as events fulfil the prophecies we shall find our faith confirmed.

‘The Spirit of God searcheth all things; yea, the deep things of God.’ Our Lord told His disciples that the Holy Ghost should show them

things to come. This was in part fulfilled when the Spirit of Christ revealed these things to John in this book. But He does not stop here: the Spirit of Truth is still the revealer of all truth, past, present, and future, to those who by prayer set themselves, like Daniel, to understand these things.

The unlettered and poor man, with little scholarship or time for study, cannot expect to go deeply into these matters. Like other great lessons from Scripture, he must to a large extent, and at first, be dependent on his teachers; on those teachers, therefore, rests a great responsibility. They, like good shepherds, must be ever searching out for good and fresh pastures for the flocks which they are to feed. And those clergy who give much time and thought and prayer to the elucidation of all Scriptures are most likely to be profitable to their people.

Another thing we have to remember about the interpretation of prophecy: one great end God means them to answer is not attained till after their fulfilment. We may apply our Lord's words thus: 'And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass ye might believe.' As the events in our Lord's life and sufferings fulfilled prophecies given hundreds



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of years before, so we are told the 'disciples remembered how it was written,' and their faith was helped mightily.

Thus we see prophecy has a twofold object; viz., to prepare for what shall happen, and then to confirm faith when it has happened.

If Jacob had paid very great attention to the dreams of his son Joseph, and believed in them as visions from God, he would have found his faith helped, and got comfort from believing, as Abraham before him did, that somehow or other his lost son would be restored to him.

If the disciples had studied the Scriptures more, and relied more implicitly on the prophecies of their great Master and Prophet, they would not have been found with others looking for the living among the dead after His resurrection. But as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again; they knew them in part, but had not let them dwell on their minds enough to make them evidence of things not seen.

Many other of the prophetic utterances of Jesus in the hearing of His disciples seemed utterly unintelligible; but as they were received and believed, so were they of use afterwards.

So, for example, they were prepared for the

outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, foretold also by Joel; for the opposition and persecution they met with; for the destruction of Jerusalem.

Not one word which God has spoken by His servants the prophets will fall to the ground unfulfilled. 'The Scriptures cannot be broken.' And as the time draws near for the accomplishment of each prediction, so will seekers after truth get more light and make more use of those prophecies.

When Daniel asked of the angel what should be the end of these things, of which he had said before, 'I heard, but I understood not,' the answer was given, 'Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.' But when St. John had his visions, the seals were unloosed; and at the close of the Revelation we read (xxii. 10): 'And He saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.' Then, too, it was added in his hearing, 'He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen.'

Let not this book be a dead letter to us, but rather let us be found looking for the blessing on 'he that readeth and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep those things

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which are written therein, for the time is at hand.'

The words in this book are all part of that truth concerning which our Lord prayed, 'Sanctify them by Thy truth. Thy word is truth.'

## XLVI.

# THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD AND OF THE CHURCH.

### II.

‘And I saw a new heaven and a new earth : for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away ; and there was no more sea.

‘And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

‘And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God.

‘And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain : for the former things are passed away.

‘And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, Write : for these words are true and faithful.’

*Revelation xxi. 1-5.*

IN spite of the great difficulties in the interpretation of the prophecies of this Book of Revelation, we shall find on a careful reading of it that there are in it certain great leading facts

concerning which there can be no manner of doubt about their meaning. And if we lay hold of these and understand them aright, we shall see reasons for their being told us beforehand, and they will help us to understand much of the future of God's people, and even of the world at large.

There may be much that will remain obscure till the time of fulfilment comes. Like a picture that we see in a dim light, we can make out the great outlines of the drawing and in part the details, but we wait for the full light of day before we can see all the beauty of the picture and the plan and purpose of the artist.

It was said of old in the sacred writings, 'The Lord God will do nothing but what He revealeth it to His servants the prophets.'

Nothing is more plainly foretold than the great fact here referred to, viz., that one day there will be such a manifest presence of God upon earth that all the world will be conscious of it, and all the earth and all mankind be better for it.

A new order of things is to be established ; a restitution of all things ; a greater degree of happiness and prosperity in every way than has ever been yet enjoyed by man upon earth.

This state or order of things—things material

and things spiritual—is called more than once in God's Word a new heaven and a new earth, the first heaven and the first earth having passed away. St. Peter says we look for this 'according to His promise.' Not implying that the present globe of the earth will cease to be, but will appear in its relation to the works upon it, to the sky, the atmosphere, and the creatures upon it, and possibly the sea, entirely different from what it is now.

Once purified by the waters of the flood, now purified by fire.

The 'promise' St. Peter refers to is found, among other places, in the prophecies of Isaiah (chap. lxv. 17): 'Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create.'

Now, all this blessedness—material, moral, and spiritual—is to be the result of God's presence being more manifestly felt and experienced by the whole creation than ever before.

This is meant by the vision which said, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them.'

'The knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea'—as St. Peter says, 'wherein dwelleth righteousness.'

‘The Lord shall be king over all the earth : in that day shall there be one Lord, and His name one’ (Zech. xiv.). That is, the worship of the true God the only worship.

Much concerning this order of things may be dark. It is the glory of God to conceal many things in His future government of the world. Thus of the day of the Lord’s coming, it was said not even the angels of heaven know of that day. This may refer to the exact time of the Lord’s second coming, but also to some of the events which are ordered to take place at that time. For the ‘day’ of the Lord scarcely ever refers to a single day of twelve hours, but to a period of time, longer or shorter. God has wise reasons for some things being retained in the secrets of His own counsels, just as before Christ came ; Peter says, ‘into which things the angels desire to look.’ On the other hand, our Lord bids us note those signs of His coming just as we note and rejoice at the signs by which we ‘know of ourselves when summer is at hand.’

‘Known unto God are all His works from the beginning.’ Nothing can happen that He has not determined beforehand is to happen. There may be delay, but cannot be forgetfulness or feebleness on the part of God to fulfil His

purposes. It is the purpose of prophecy to keep God's people in sight, as it were, of just so much as He tells us of the future, lest we should think His purposes are failing, and that He has forgotten to be gracious. We are to be on the watch, on the look-out; and so He tells us what to expect, though not always when it will happen.

Thus, for example, we learn to see a connection between the very first promise in the first pages of Genesis, and the fulfilment of the promise in the last chapters of the Book of Revelation. 'The seed of the woman is to bruise the head of the serpent' is in Genesis iii. St. John in the Revelation sees 'the old serpent, called the Devil and Satan,' after his last endeavours to deceive mankind 'cast into the bottomless pit,' and after the Millennium 'cast into the lake of fire and brimstone.'

These two events stand out in relief in the Book of Revelation: First, the coming of Him who is the seed of the woman; secondly, the final bruising of the head of the serpent. But before the serpent or dragon is finally bruised, he is permitted to put forth his power for hurting mankind, and even bruising the heel of the Seed of the woman. Hence there are in various ways discovered to us the evil things he is



permitted to bring upon the inhabitants of the earth. And as our Lord foretold 'wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes, pestilences, famines, signs and wonders, the sea and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing for fear,' so we find all these evils foretold again under the visions of the opening of the 'seals' of the Book; of 'the vials' and 'trumpets' and 'woes.' And the inhabitants of the earth are warned to expect some of these fearful woes, because the devil is come down to you 'having great wrath, because he knows that his time is short.'

This is an important prophecy even in its mysterious figure-clothing; because when these things are taking place many might be led to think that the increase and extension of the devil's power might be a failure of God's promises, whereas, on the contrary, it is rather an evidence of all happening in accordance with the mind and purposes of God.

The world grows weary of waiting, and scoffers cast it in the teeth of God's children, 'Where is the promise of His coming?' 'Where,' say they, 'is the power, and where the victory over evil, you ascribe to the Son of God through the Gospel?' Our answer is, 'Here in the prophetic Scriptures.' 'God is not slack as men count slackness.' He is long-suffering, waiting to be

gracious; but He has certain purposes to be answered in letting a 'great temptation come upon all the world to try them,' before the author of sin is finally destroyed.'

Meantime, the Gospel is being spread among all nations as a witness before the end comes. God is taking out a people from among the Gentiles to the glory of His Name. Many of His people 'shall be purified, made white, and tried, while the wicked still do wickedly' (see Dan. xii.).

The first great event—first in order, first in importance, and to which the eyes of all the Churches are directed—is the coming of the Son of Man. More or less, directly or indirectly, is everything of the future connected with this great hope of the Church.

So in the first chapter of this Revelation it is written, 'Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen.' And again at the close of the book it is written, 'He which testifieth of these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so; come, Lord Jesus.'

Let us ever keep this great promise of His coming uppermost in our minds. It is intended it should stand first: for our own sake who may

be alive at His coming; for our departed friends whom He will bring with Him; for the sake of the whole Church which is waiting for the liberty of the children of God—yea, for the sake of the whole creation which together groaneth, waiting for that day; for the sake of all the glory that shall be revealed in that day to all who shall see the King in His beauty. Be it ours, then, beloved, to be looking for that day when the prayers of all saints shall be answered, His kingdom come, and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Oh, blessed and glorious time when the great voices in heaven shall be responded to by the voices of His people on earth, 'saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. Amen' (Rev. xi.).

## XLVII.

### WEARY OF LIFE.

‘He himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die: and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers.’—*1 Kings* xix. 4.

‘Rebekah said to Isaac, I am weary of my life.’—*Genesis* xxvii. 46.

‘Then Judas went and hanged himself.’—*Matthew* xxvii. 5.

NOT often people get so weary of life as to wish to leave the world. Yet, of course, there are often cases of such intense suffering that the patient prays for release. There are also cases of persons who, like Judas, wish to end life because life presents to them no more pleasure, and nothing but shame. Such persons, like him, are tempted by the devil to put an end to their life with their own hands. This is the height of folly and the most intense selfishness. It is the height of folly, for it is rushing from evils known to evils unknown, and which, to

say the least, may be far worse. Thus we remember what our Lord said to the man He had delivered from the burden of thirty-eight years of bedridden life, 'Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.'

Those who destroy their own life are often, like Judas, acting under the instigation of him who has the power of death, and whose servants they are, and, like him, 'go to their own place' when they die.

The ancients were frequently in the habit of committing suicide, and even thought it an honourable way of ending life. But they were without hope, because without God in the world.

But we, with all the glorious hopes that we have in Christ, should indeed be far removed from such mistaken notions.

Is it not the height of selfishness when, to escape sorrow or suffering in our own person, we think only of ourselves and leave friends to suffer for our sin, and no longer take our share of the burdens and trials of life?

But are there no circumstances in which it is not wrong to wish to die, as Elijah did, when he sat under a juniper-tree and requested for himself that he might die? His motive in wishing this may have been a mixed one. His life was

threatened by the wicked woman Jezebel, from whose wrath he was now hiding himself.

Possibly he ought rather to have felt that if God preserved it, as He had hitherto done, there was work for him to do. At the same time, it is evident his chief reason for this request was his feeling that his work for God was done. He was no better than his fathers who were asleep in their graves. He thought he was pretty nearly the only true servant of God left. As long as he could do good he would not wish to die.

I am inclined to think his motive was pure, and therefore he was not wrong, and the more so because his request was granted him in a far better way than he had expected. He asked for death, but God took him to Himself without passing through death.

How graciously did God deal with him in this great extremity! An angel was sent to feed him and prepare for forty days' fasting on Horeb, the Mount of God. He was shown that God's presence was to be felt not in any great outward convulsion of nature, as in wind, fire, or earthquake, but in the still, small voice which he could hear without fear. He was told of his mistake when he said, 'I, even I, only am left.' God had 'reserved to Himself yet seven thou-

sand who had not bowed the knee to Baal.' He was told that his place was to be supplied by another prophet, and of others who should carry out God's purposes in the kingdom. And then, when these appointments had been made, he was taken up into heaven.

Thus was the weary servant of God taken from the evil to come, and his request for death met by a withdrawal into Paradise.

If ever we are in circumstances of suffering so that death looks preferable to life, there is one thought above all others should prevail; and that is, that no true child of God whose life is hid with Christ in God will be left to suffer here one day or one hour longer than is needful to answer God's purposes for himself or for those around him. The sufferings are part of God's purpose for perfecting the work of His children. We may wish those purposes could be more quickly accomplished, but we may not hasten God's work or selfishly wish to escape them. 'Ye have need of patience,' says the Apostle to suffering Christians, 'that after ye have done the will of God ye may receive the promise.' Life is, after all, too short, and the lessons learnt in it too necessary, to wish such life shortened. When once we die we are 'as water spilt on the ground that cannot be gathered again.'

I have often seen sick-bed sufferers to whom death would be a blessed termination, and I have not felt wrong in praying for the end. But such prayers from sufferers or their friends must always have the qualifying clause, 'Nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done.'

Then let us bear in mind that one great lesson from Elijah's case is this, that a longing to depart implies a preparation for the change. Elijah had no fear of death. He lived in such close communion with his God that a removal from earth by death or otherwise was but a translation into His more immediate presence.

This is the state of mind we should desire, nay, we should have attained to, if true and faithful servants of God. We should be able to say, 'For me to live is Christ, to die is gain.' Not only is this the language of eminent servants like St. Paul or Elijah: for the humblest believer this is his privilege. Death has been robbed of its sting. And the grave is to be feared as little as his bed.

If we feel far from this happy state of mind, is it not from our not realizing our undoubted privilege of being justified by faith, at peace with God through Christ, and rejoicing in hope of glory?

Is it not because we are still in doubt how far



Jesus is our representative in mansions prepared by Him for us? Is it not that the world has such possession of our hearts that we have not as yet realized our future inheritance, and we are too satisfied to live on without this assurance of our reconciliation with God and our unquestionable title to glory?

We do not want or expect young people to be so full of the thoughts of heaven that they really want to leave the world, with all its pleasures and interests. This is beyond human nature. Nor does God expect it of us. But what is expected of us is that if He should call us to leave the world, at whatever age, we should feel we have a well-grounded hope that we are prepared. We should, indeed, find our duties in this world, and our enjoyment of innocent pleasures, make us wish to stay here as long as God thinks fit; but it is no good sign if, when the call comes to us to go up higher, we cannot feel we are clothed in a wedding-garment, and that the Great King will admit us to the heavenly feast.

## XLVIII.

### COMFORT IN DEATH.

‘ But I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others, which have no hope.

‘ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him,

‘ For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

‘ For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God : and the dead in Christ shall rise first ;

‘ Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds : and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

‘ Wherefore comfort one another with these words.’

I *Thessalonians* iv. 13-18.

THE words with which the Apostle bids us comfort one another are indeed words of comfort. He was writing to some, it seems, who were sorrowing over lost friends or relations.

He reminds them that their sorrow should not be like the sorrow of the heathen around them, who were without Christ, without God, and

therefore without hope. He would not have Christians ignorant concerning the state of friends and relations who have been followers of Christ on earth. They are not dead: they sleep in Christ. And as we believe Christ died and rose, and so triumphed over death and the grave, so all those who are 'in Christ' in life are 'in Christ' in death, and will certainly appear again when Christ appears the second time.

He writes as though some then alive might be alive when Christ comes, and if so, he says, 'we which are alive and remain' on earth up to that time will not be beforehand with (prevent) those that have fallen asleep. But they, the 'dead in Christ,' will rise first, and then we who are alive at the time will be caught up together with them in the clouds, and so both quick and dead will join the Lord, and all be united in His presence, where we shall be for ever.

This, then, refers to the 'first resurrection.' No one can say when it will be. But one thing we do know, from this and other passages: it will be when the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, when the trump of God, sounded by the archangel, will awake those that are asleep in Christ.

The power of Christ will change the vile body—the natural body—giving us new and spiritual

bodies like His own. We shall be fitted to inherit, what flesh and blood could not inherit, the kingdom of heaven. So he writes elsewhere, 'We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body' (Phil. iii. 21).

The same thought is enlarged upon in 1 Cor. xv., where it is written, 'Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible.' And then it is added, 'we,' *i.e.*, who are alive, 'shall be changed, for this corruptible must put on incorruption.'

It is long since these words were written by St. Paul, and tens of thousands of Christ's people have fallen asleep, and the Lord has not yet come. But He that tarrieth will come. Time that is long to us is as a moment to God. Those that are asleep, whether conscious or not, are safe in Christ's keeping; but without us they will not be made perfect, till He come, and then we, too, shall be changed.

So our Lord comforted His disciples: 'I will come again, and receive you to Myself, that where I am there ye may be also. Let not your

heart be troubled.' And so says His servant, 'Comfort one another with this blessed thought.'

For whom, then, is this comfort? It is for those who, living by faith in Christ, will fall asleep in Him, and therefore have nothing to fear in death or in the judgment after death. We are to take this comfort to ourselves, first in our own prospect of death, or of the Lord's appearing; we are to think of death as a sleep. It is indeed departing to be with Christ, and so being with Him in Paradise. But the full enjoyment of glory with Christ in a glorified body and with glorified saints cannot be till Christ comes again. It is enough to know that our life is safe in His keeping. We are not told what is the exact condition of spirits separate from the body. We should like to know, and many are men's speculations on the subject. But we must keep to what is written: 'Secret things belong to God.' Enough for us to know it is a happy state of security. If God chooses to use any of His people in that state, as He did His servant Moses, who appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration, we know all things are possible to Him. He can do so. But the grand object of hope set before the people of God is the coming of Christ with the risen saints and with His holy

angels, and the unspeakable glory which will then follow.

In proportion as our faith is strong in Christ—His death for us, His resurrection for us—and we have His Spirit bearing witness with ours, so will this be a comforting hope. And we must ever pray that the ‘God of hope will so fill us with joy and peace in believing that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.’

And should we be called upon, as we must be, to part with those with whom we are linked together in the strong ties of affection, then comes in the unspeakable comfort, we are only separated for a time. Yet a little while and we shall see them again. This lessens our grief, and quite changes the nature of our sorrow. We think of them as taken from us for a short time, resting from their labours; and when we meet again we shall be sharers together of the fulness of joy in His presence, where there are pleasures for evermore. If, through grace, we know this comfort for ourselves, let us try and impart it to others when we have opportunity, and so comfort one another with the same comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. It is the comfort Jesus spake to mourners

when on earth, and now speaks to each of us :  
' He or she is not dead, but sleepeth.'

God would not have us nurse our grief, though He knows afflictions must be grievous to flesh and blood. But He would have us exercise such faith in His promises that we may submit with a good grace to the heaviest dispensations, and in the depths of woe still, like His servants, be able to say, ' It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good.' ' Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, rejoicing in the hope of glory.'

## XLIX.

### WHAT WE ARE, AND WHAT WE SHALL BE.

‘Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God : therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not.

‘Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him ; for we shall see Him as He is.

‘And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.’

*1 John iii. 1-3.*

HERE is indeed a blessed reminder of what God has done for us through His dear Son, and what He will do for us in the world to come.

We are now the children of God. We shall be this, but something more, in the next world. The whole of it is beyond our understanding, but not therefore beyond us to hope for.

When God says to us, ‘Behold!’ we may well stop and consider and look with eager eyes. John the Baptist said, ‘Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,’ and many heeded, and did see the ‘glory as of the



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only begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth.'

Here John the Apostle and the beloved disciple of the Lamb of God says, 'Behold, what kind of love has been bestowed on us that we should be called sons of God!'

This is the same truth he bore witness to when beginning the Gospel he wrote, when he says, 'As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.'

We are not only called sons, but, as he adds, 'now are we sons.'

'Such honour have all His saints.' There is no middle state. We are adopted into God's family through Christ, who is thus our Elder Brother, or else we are 'children of wrath,' not taken into the family.

But this and all the Epistles are addressed to Christians as members of the family of God, and 'children of God through faith in Christ.'

To have received Christ, to have believed on His name, to have been born again, and to have received the spirit of adoption, are all connected together in the experience of every true disciple of Christ.

Yet it would be a mistake to say that all professing members of any visible Church on earth are therefore members of Christ's mystical body. The Apostle, who writes charitably to all professors as 'called saints,' yet warns them, 'If any have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His,' and bids them examine themselves whether they be in the faith, whether Christ be in them.

But let us suppose we are true to our calling, and we are led by the Spirit, and so are the sons of God, 'behold,' what love is here!

Do we sufficiently consider this marvellous privilege of true sonship? An honour indeed it would be to be a doorkeeper, a servant of servants, in the House of God; but to be admitted into the bosom of the family, to be a sharer of the very glory which the Son of God enjoys, this is wondrous love!

The prodigal son is satisfied with the thought of being among the hired servants, if only he can get back into the house. But our Father in heaven reveals His love to us in Christ thus, 'I call you not servants, but friends.'

If the truth makes us free, it knocks off all marks of slavery, gives tokens of the nearest and dearest kinship, and makes us free indeed. Free it makes us to enjoy familiar intercourse with

the Father; free to come and free to ask with boldness for all a Father's goodwill can bestow; free at last to enter with holy boldness the very mansions of His eternal presence.

Do earthly parents keep their children at arm's length? Are they surprised if they are found in their choicest apartments, sharing the delicacies of their table? No; they grieve if there appear the shadow of coldness or fear or distance between them. Oh! why do we doubt our Father's love? That love passes the love of women and of all earthly parents. It bids us call Him Father, and bids us rejoice in the liberty of the children of God. 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God.'

But you will observe here that we are not to expect our title to this honour to be recognised by the world. 'The world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not.'

The world may see little or no difference between those who are of the world, worldly, and the true children of God. Where God sees the greatest difference the world may see least. No title of rank, no emblems of outward honour, no insignia of glory, mark God's children, as the world marks its own. There is a beauty of character, an ornament of meekness and gentleness, but too often unnoticed, or set down to

natural causes, not grace. They have themselves the witness of the Spirit, but the world does not receive that Spirit, 'because it seeth Him not, nor knoweth Him.'

If it was so with Christ, in whom dwelt the Godhead bodily, how can it be otherwise with us in our imperfect reflection of Christ's goodness?

We must be satisfied to be as Christ was—beloved of the Father, hated of the world.

But 'what we shall be doth not yet appear.' The fulness of glory, the nature and extent of that service, the satisfying pleasures that await us—all this is beyond us fully to grasp in our limited understandings.

Therefore 'it doth not appear,' is not fully revealed. If God has told us earthly things, and we cannot believe, how shall we believe if He tell us the full extent of the glory which eye hath not seen?

It is enough that, being like Christ now, we shall be like Him then. We are partakers of the Divine nature; we shall be partakers of the Divine glory. 'We shall see Him as he is.' We have seen Him with the eye of faith as He was, the Son of Mary, and yet the Son of God. We shall see Him as He is now, and as He will

appear then, when He comes in the glory of the Eternal Father and the glory of the holy angels.

‘Our eyes shall see the King in His beauty.’ He wants us to see it. So He said in His audible prayer to the Father: ‘Father, I will that they also, which Thou hast given Me, be with Me, that they may behold My glory.’

We cannot rightly conceive of that glory, nor even of those ‘spiritual bodies’ which we shall then have to enable us both to see and to enjoy that glory.

But all that is told us let us prize. Let us often think about it. Let it sometimes thrill our hearts with the joyous prospect. We are slow to dwell on it because too stony of heart to believe, too fully occupied with the honours and pleasures of this world.

Stronger faith and deeper love will make us rejoice more in the glory of God. We shall find this the best receipt for comfort under disappointments, bereavements, and all the sorrows of life. We shall find it has a purifying effect on our hearts and lives. ‘Everyone that hath this hope purifieth himself, even as He is pure.’ The blessed hope of being like Christ in everlasting glory will stir us up to seek and pray for

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more conformity to His image in righteousness and holiness.

The saints of old had this hope, as it is written : ' I shall be satisfied when I wake up after Thy likeness.'

L.

## IN PARADISE WITH CHRIST.

‘ And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us.

‘ But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation ?

‘ And we indeed justly ; for we receive the due reward of our deeds : but this Man hath done nothing amiss.

‘ And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.

‘ And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.’

*St. Luke xxiii. 39-43.*

OF all interesting inquiries this almost stands first in the minds of thoughtful Christians : Where do we go to when we die ? What is that intermediate state between death and the resurrection ?

Is the soul asleep while the body lies crumbling to dust ? Is the ‘ spirit of man, which goeth upward,’ in a conscious state of enjoyment before the time comes for the union to take place between the ‘ resurrection body and the restored spirit ’ ?

If the souls of the faithful after departure are in joy and felicity, where are the souls of the unbelieving, the impenitent ?

These and suchlike inquiries must naturally have occurred at times to all thinking minds. Unless, indeed, we have sunk into the unhappy, unbelieving state of thinking that, when man dies, he perishes body and soul like the beasts of the earth. Such cases are rare. Man, made in the image of God, even in his most degraded, heathen, ignorant state, cannot but believe in a future existence.

The words of our Lord to the dying thief do not answer all the questions before us. They tell of a paradise, and of the soul going there after death together with Christ—a most blessed thought to the man dying by the side of Jesus in fearful pain of body ; a wonderful and gracious answer to his prayer to be remembered in the kingdom of heaven, when it should be established. More than he asked for. Not ‘by-and-by in My kingdom,’ but ‘to-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.’ United with Christ in suffering, he would the same day share the glorious rest that awaited Him in glory.

Still the questions remain : Will all go to paradise ? Where and what is paradise ? Where did the soul of the unbelieving thief go to ?



In pursuing these inquiries, and seeking answers from the Word of God, let us begin with remembering that complete and satisfying answers to them all we must not expect. The future state of disembodied spirits, the exact place meant by the word 'paradise,' the immediate presence of God and His holy angels, the place where Christ went and preached to the disobedient spirits after His own death, these must be considered as among the 'secret things that belong to God,' and not wholly and in all points revealed and made clear to man—the reason, or at least the chief one, being, that we are not in a condition to understand them. As St. John says even of the inhabitants of the mansions promised, 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be.' God tells us earthly things difficult to believe; how would it be if He told us more about heavenly things? What is told us is enough—enough to satisfy us and make us happy, if, like the thief, we are true believers in Christ. As the union between our soul and body, our reasoning faculties and our earthly tabernacle, is beyond us to understand, so, when the separation takes place, it is not surprising that beyond the boundaries of this existence there is mystery.

What, for instance, are the celestial bodies of

angels? It is impossible for us to understand how they can appear in the midst of us on earth as men, and yet the next moment disappear to return to where they came from—their invisible abode.

Where are those myriads of angelic beings? where the throne they are surrounding? What their powers of assuming human form, and coming to and going from the sons of men? When God's children leave this world and have spiritual bodies, they will be like angels. But are their spiritual bodies with them when they leave their earthly tenements? The Apostle would seem to imply not so, till He comes and changes our vile bodies and fashions them like His own. 'It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.' But it is not raised till Christ comes again.

How, then, are we to think of our friends who have died before us? What is to be our own expectation at the moment of death?

For one thing, it is called a sleep: 'They that sleep in Jesus.' Always 'sleep' is the state of the departed in Christ. Now, sleep is a quiescent, unconscious state. Except we dream, which is only as sleep is imperfect, it is an unthinking, unconscious state.

The term is applied to our being, not only to

the body, but surely to our rational soul, with its powers of reason and memory and thought. All this sleeps till Christ's voice awakes us on the morning of the resurrection. If it be an unconscious state, then time is nothing to it. When we sleep soundly we are not aware how many hours we have been asleep. So, in this last sleep, it will not seem a long time if we have been sleeping twenty years, or fifty, or, as with those who fell asleep in the days of Christ, two thousand years ; when they and we awake our last days on earth will only seem to us yesterday. This will account for our Lord telling His disciples He would 'come again and receive them to Himself,' and 'I will raise him up at the last day,' and, again, 'All that are in their graves shall hear His voice and come forth.'

But then comes the question as to the promise of being in paradise with Christ, the day of death, and St. Paul's saying, 'to depart and be with Christ is far better.'

But is it needful to understand here more than the happiness of being in a safe state in the keeping of Christ? It need not imply more than would be the case if asleep and in His keeping, as it is said, 'Your life is hid with Christ in God ; when Christ, who is our life,

shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.' This is being 'absent from the body and present with the Lord.'

Meantime, while this is the lot of all who can say, 'For me to live is Christ,' and who can therefore add, 'to die will be gain,' what must be said of those who die out of Christ, and though, like the other thief, living near and dying near Christ, not saved by Him?

All we can say is: there is no paradise for them. Nor do we read of any purgatory, or place for purifying; wherever their spirits may be, they await the great day when they, too, shall awake, although to the resurrection of judgment.

Knowing all this, it is for us, without prying too closely into hidden things, to be 'giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure.' To be in Christ now, to be found in Him when He comes, to be the Lord's servants whether we wake or sleep, with our loins girded and our lights burning, to be found watching, to have oil in our vessels, to have on the wedding garment: these are the things that concern us, to have our minds wholly set on, that we may have boldness at the day of judgment, and not be ashamed at His coming.

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