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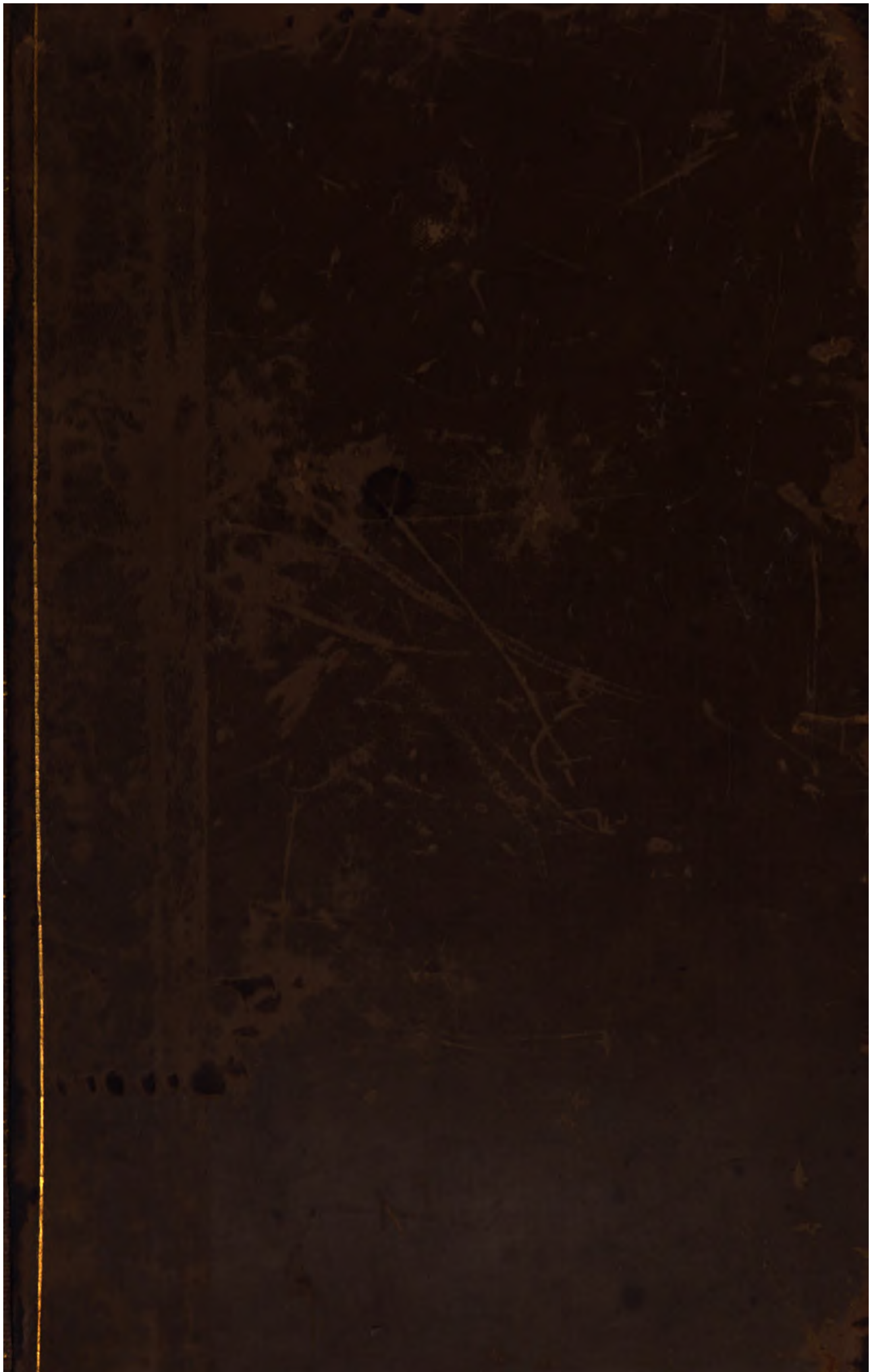
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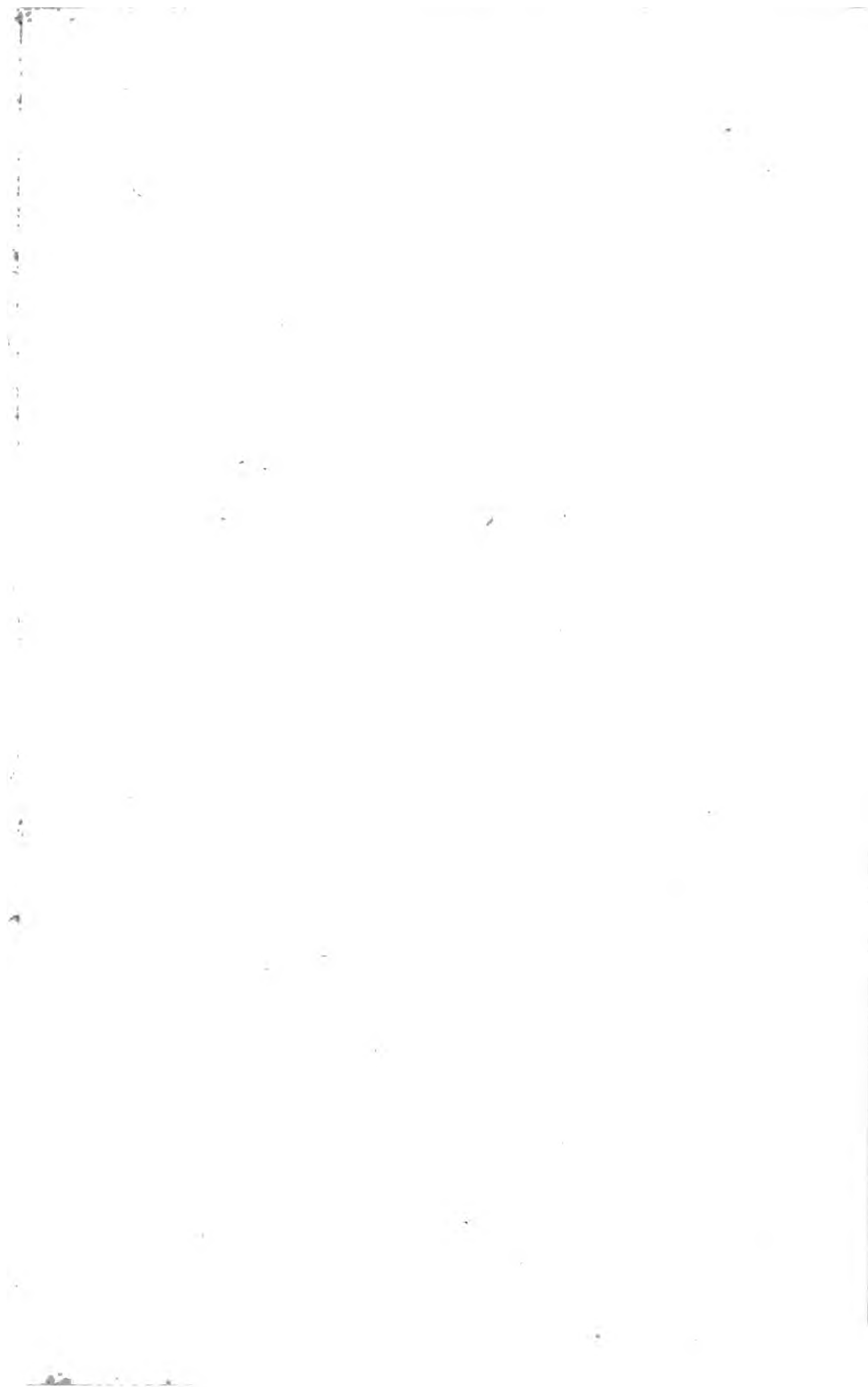


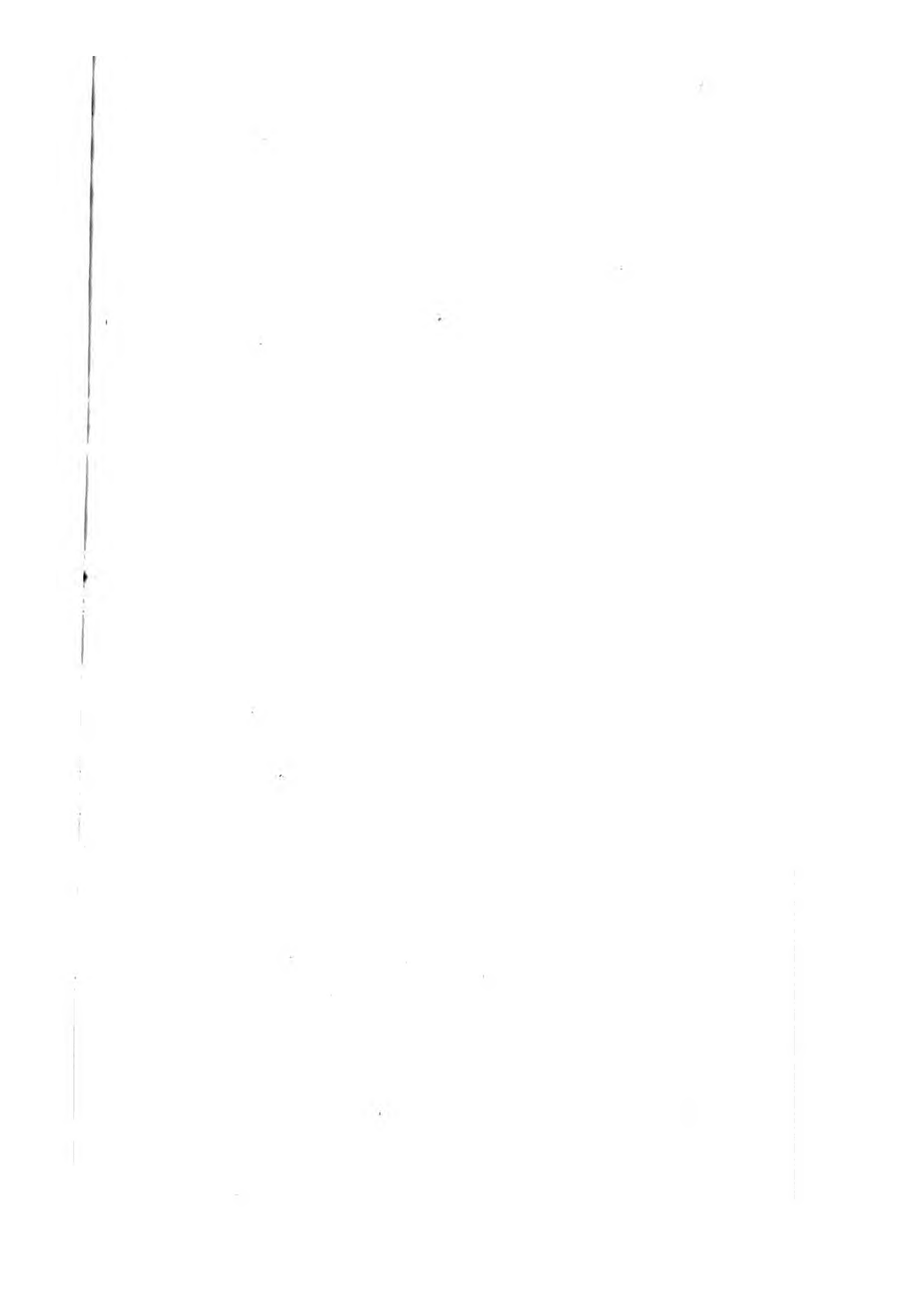
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Parish Sermons,

FOR

EVERY SUNDAY IN THE YEAR:

BY

Reginald Heber.

VOL. I.

LONDON :
Printed by A. SPOTTISWOODE,
New-Street-Square.

SERMONS

ON

THE LESSONS, THE GOSPEL, OR THE EPISTLE,

FOR

EVERY SUNDAY IN THE YEAR.

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF HODNET,
SALOP:

BY THE LATE

REGINALD HEBER, M. A.

RECTOR OF HODNET:

AND, AFTERWARDS, LORD BISHOP OF CALCUTTA.

VOL. I.

ADVENT TO WHITSUNDAY.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

MDCCCXXXVII.

738.



PREFACE.

THE following Sermons have been committed to me, with a view to their publication.

In executing this task, I discharge a duty, alike to the living, and to the dead; to The Church of GOD, and to the memory of a friend. I believe, that, while they will add a new interest and lustre to the name of REGINALD HEBER, and will awaken a fresh regret for his loss, they will, not less assuredly, extend to distant places, and to distant years, the edification and improvement, which, at the time, they were designed, and calculated, to convey to the circle of his little flock in his own parish.

It is only necessary to add, that the Sermons for Sundays are arranged according to the course of the Ecclesiastical year; and occupy two volumes: those for the Sundays from

Advent to Whitsuntide, Vol. I.:—and those for the Trinity Sundays, Vol. II. The Sermons for week-day festivals, and a few on general occasions, closed by a Farewell Sermon on taking leave of the Parish of Hodnet, occupy Vol. III.

ROBERT HARRY INGLIS.

London, Jan. 25. 1837.

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SERMON I.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

ST. MATTHEW, xxi. 13.

My house shall be called the house of prayer.

THE circumstances, which gave rise to these words, and which have been shortly related in the Gospel of to-day, will be understood by you more clearly, when I shall have explained what the practice was, which our Saviour there strongly condemns.

The Temple of Jerusalem being different from our Christian churches, both in the multitudes which it was to contain, and the kind of worship which was practised there, was not, as we might fancy, a small roofed building like that in which we are assembled, but a vast square court, of three or four hundred feet every way, open over head to the sky, but surrounded with pillared walks and cloisters, and capable of containing many thousand worshippers together with

their offerings. At the west end of this court was the sanctuary, or House of the Lord, a sort of chapel, into which the priests only were allowed to enter; and before this last, and in the midst of the court, was a large stone altar for the burnt offerings.

The outer court, therefore, and the cloister round it, were the places where the people stood and prayed; and common decency required that this, as the scene of their solemn assembly, and the spot where they were to offer up their petitions to the Most High, should be kept with neatness and propriety, and devoted to the service of God alone. Of this propriety, however, the Jews both are and always have been exceedingly regardless. I have been in one of their synagogues, where the greater number of those who were present were talking about their own concerns, and settling their private bargains; and many of their ancient rabbins complain heavily, and almost in the words of the Lord, of the impiety of those who made the synagogue a house of merchandise. But in the case of the Temple the offence was still greater, from the peculiar holiness of that one mountain which God had chosen to put His name there; from the positive laws of the ancient Jews, which forbade them so much as to enter it with their shoes on their feet, or with staves in their hands, or to carry any burthen or parcel through it; and

from the particular abuses and extortions of those persons who were thus turned out by our Saviour, and whose practices were such as fully to justify the severe name of "thieves."

The case was this : — Every grown up person in the Jewish nation was obliged by the law to attend at the time of Easter in the Temple, when, after certain offerings, they were admitted to the great yearly sacrifice. In like manner, at the birth of a first-born son, and on certain other occasions, they were obliged to offer, according to their circumstances, a calf, a lamb, or a pair of young pigeons, as an offering of purification. Now as those Israelites who came from a distance could not conveniently bring the proper offerings with them, the officers of the Temple sold doves and lambs to such as wanted them for this purpose, and had their stalls within the cloisters, where, having the command of the market, and their customers being anxious to finish those religious ceremonies for which they came, they rated their commodities at a very extravagant and oppressive price, often demanding a piece of gold for a single pigeon. Hence, too, another great oppression arose ; for, as the worshippers had not always sufficient money to answer such demands, or required to have their money changed, others were ready, who either lent them money at interest, contrary to the law of Moses, or required a heavy per centage on

every sum, how small soever, which they reduced into a more convenient form. The noise, the quarrelling, the confusion to which such proceedings gave rise, may be easily conceived; and as none were admitted into the Temple who did not thus pay at the door, many of the poor were completely shut out from the house of God, which was, of right, common to all. As many, however, of the rich men and the magistrates derived a considerable profit from the practice, no one had power to alter that of which many complained: and St. Jerome, perhaps with reason, considers it as one of the most extraordinary miracles ever wrought by our Saviour, and only to be accounted for by the Divine terrors of His eye and His awful countenance, that a single man like Him, without any worldly authority or claim to respect, could, at once, and without resistance, drive out such a multitude of interested and insolent attendants and guards as were concerned in this traffic. But, be this as it may, whether the Divine power were visibly exercised on this occasion, or whether, as is more naturally to be supposed, the number of that believing multitude who followed Jesus with their loud hosannas, were not of itself sufficient to account for the awe which seized the profaners of the Temple, there are other considerations, which arise from this story, in themselves of more consequence and more surely founded on Scripture :

and of these the first is, that Christ, by this act of authority, laid open claim, and was understood, by the Jews, to lay such claim to the office of the Messiah, and to the rank of the Son of God. The very action itself was that of a master in his own house ; and it was typical of that which our Lord himself was shortly after to accomplish ; namely, the turning out of the Jewish priests and Levites from the spiritual temple of God, as stewards who had abused their trust, and who were to give place to other and more faithful guardians. Further, however, the action of casting the offending Levites out of the Temple was one which the Jews, both by tradition and prophecy, were led to expect that the Messiah should perform, as the only person who had either the power, or the lawful authority, to interfere in such a question. The general tradition ran that the Messiah was to restore the second Temple, which then stood, to the same and even greater dignity than had been enjoyed by the former ; and our Saviour's conduct on this day had been accurately described four hundred years before, by the prophet Malachi. " The Lord, whom ye seek," are his words, " shall suddenly come to his temple, even the Messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in : behold, He shall come, saith the LORD of Hosts. But who may abide the day of His coming ? and who shall stand when He appeareth ? for He is

like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap : and He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver ; and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness." ¹

The same was He, of whom John the Baptist spoke, " whose fan was in His hand, wherewith He was throughly to purge his threshing floor ;" and of whose devouring zeal for the house of God, David had long since testified. Therefore it was, that the people, beholding these things, gave honour to Him as the son of David : therefore, were the chief priests and rulers so grievously enraged, when they witnessed that this despised Nazarene had now begun to take unto himself His great power, and to reign as it had been foretold of Him : and this explains, why Jesus, when they asked Him for His authority for such acts of royalty, referred them to the testimony which John had borne of Him, and which, unless they could deny it to be of heavenly inspiration, of force compelled them to acknowledge, that He, who came after John, had been from age to age before him, and was indeed the Son of God, the King of Israel.

These things they saw, but saw in vain ; miserable that they were, whose day of grace was set, their opportunity of repentance gone by, and the axe of justice already laid to the

¹ Malachi, iii. 1, 2, 3.

tree of their strength! May we, my brethren, take warning by their faults and their fate; and make such use of the day of the Lord, that we may understand the things which belong to our everlasting peace, before they are hid from our eyes!

There are several other more minute and practical observations which arise from this part of Scripture, and of which I shall now attempt to give you the most important. First, when we behold the reverence which Christ both himself paid, and required to be paid by others, to that Temple of the Jews, which was so soon to be destroyed, can we help perceiving the inference, which naturally follows, as to the duty of paying all due respect to the houses of prayer in our own land, dedicated as they are to the service of a faith which is never to pass away unto the end of the world? Let not him boast the name of Christ's follower, who neglects the outward tokens of respect within these sacred walls, even when prayers are not celebrating; or who devotes the place of the Lord's name to profane and unworthy uses, even when the altar is empty of its mysteries. But what shall be said of those who, in the very hour of prayer, and when two or three are gathered together in the name of the Lord, and when, if they believe the Gospel, the Lord himself is personally present in the midst of them, will, before that

awful presence, indulge in sleep, or irreverent postures of the body, or idle talk, or wandering and wicked thoughts; (all thoughts must be wicked which have no relation to the solemn business of the hour;—how much more those which are in themselves offensive to God!) who come hither with their heads and fancies full of secular cares, or the cares of the week, or the lusts of the eye; and fear not, or care not, that the angel of death may seize on them as he did on Eutychus¹ in the time of their slumbering, or that Christ himself may, perhaps, return in an hour, of which they are not aware, to cast out of His temple such as do offend, and all who work iniquity, to that outer darkness where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth? Surely, surely, he who reflects, that, in this house of solemn assembly, he was received in his tender years into the number of Christians, made here, if he have not forfeited the privilege, a child of God; that here he is called on to receive the symbols of salvation and grace in the body and blood of our Redeemer; that on the words which he here repeats or attends to, his eternal happiness or misery must, according to the use which he makes of them, depend; that the God of heaven and earth is here to shower down on his head either a blessing or a curse, in proportion as his prayers are sincere, or are unholy; surely he, who con-

¹ Acts, xx. 9.

siders these things, will be far from allowing his thoughts to wander in the house of prayer ; but will rather exclaim, with the patriarch Jacob, “ Surely the LORD is in this place, and I knew it not ! How dreadful is this place ! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”¹

There is, however, one caution of still more consequence than that which I have just stated. If such honour be due, such purity and decency to be observed, in regard of those houses of brick and stone which are called after the name of the Most High, what shall be the lot of those who defile with lust and sin the living temple of the Holy Ghost, — those bodies in which the Grace of the Most High delighteth to dwell ; which are sanctified by baptism ; purchased by the Blood of Christ ; and exalted, above the angelical nature, in Him who sometime came in the flesh with great lowliness and infirmity, but hath now ascended into Heaven, far above all principality and dominion, and power, and hath put all things under his feet ! May He give us grace, that these earthly tabernacles, which he hath purified, may be cleansed, indeed, from all sinful stain ; and that we may rejoice with Him, in body and soul, and with our elder brethren the angels, in the day, when this corruptible must put on incorruption ; and this mortal, immortality.

¹ Genesis, xxviii. 17.

SERMON II.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

ROMANS, xv. 7.

Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

THE meaning, which is borne by the word “receive” in the present passage,—in what manner, and in what respects we are commanded to “receive one another,”—will be made more plain by looking back to the first verse of the fourteenth chapter, and to the general chain of reasoning, in which, through all the following verses, the Apostle is engaged. He there instructs us “to receive him that is weak in the faith, but not to doubtful disputations :” and he then goes on to reckon up the various unimportant points of doctrine and practice, on which ignorant or superstitious Christians were, even in those early times, divided. Those differences, almost all, arose from questions about the law of Moses, which one very numerous party believed to be still in force ; and which the other side, as well as the Apostles them-

selves, were taught by the Holy Ghost to believe, had been done away by the sacrifice and death of the Messiah.

Thus, the former, or Jewish party, accounted it sinful to eat pork, or rabbits, or water-fowl, or anything dressed with blood, or anything which had not been killed by a Jew, or in any other manner than that which the Jewish customs appointed: and as in a heathen country it was difficult to find any flesh-meat free from some one or other of these objections; these men chose rather to live on herbs and roots only, than to transgress the ordinances of Moses and the ancient rabbins. The latter, on the other hand, knew that God, as he had declared by vision to St. Peter, had made all things clean by the blood of his Son; and that whatever food was wholesome, was also lawful to be eaten in moderation and thankfulness. Again, the former were accustomed to keep holy, not only the first day of the week, or our Sunday, which from the beginning of the Church had been always observed as a day of public prayer and solemn assemblage; but they, moreover, observed the feasts of the new moon, and of the tabernacles, and the passover, as appointed by Moses or the Jewish elders; and, above all, they were resolute to abstain from all work on the Jewish Sabbath, that is, from Friday evening to Saturday evening. The opposite party, far better instructed in the nature of Christ's

religion, well knew that these observances were no longer binding on the conscience: that the law of ceremonies of times and days had been cancelled by Christ, and nailed, as useless, to his cross: that one day was not by nature more holy than another; and that the church of Christ might fix on any day, which they thought fitting, for the necessary work of worship and instruction.

To make peace between these parties is St. Paul's endeavour, in his thirteenth and the beginning of his fourteenth chapter; and this purpose he pursues by urging on them both the consideration of the common object, which both professed to have in view,—the glory, that is, of God, and the advance of Christ's religion. The Jewish Christian, who abstained from flesh-meat, and from work on the Saturday, did both, as he believed, in compliance with God's will; and with the hope that by thus favouring the prejudices of his countrymen, he should remove, in part, their objections to the Gospel. The Gentile Christian, for his part, was moved by a more enlightened notion of God's glory and of the power of the Gospel: he would not do away with the liberty wherewith Christ had made him free, by a return to the elementary forms of the elder covenant; and he feared, with reason, that the heathen would never be converted to the faith of Christ, if that faith were clogged with a burthen

of ceremonies and restrictions, which the Jews themselves had been scarcely able to bear.

That one of these opposite parties was right, and the other, wrong; St. Paul does not deny: and that the latter was right, he had proved at large in all the former chapters of this epistle. But that they both meant well, and both, though by different methods, pursued the same great object, he urges on both, and more particularly on his own, or the better instructed party, as a reason for patience and forbearance, and, to use his own expression, for "receiving one another." He reminds those, who were of the same opinion with himself, that the superstition of their antagonists, though it might be weak, and might be wrong, was of infinitely little importance, when compared with the righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, which should be the objects of a Christian's care. He does more; he entreats them to comply, where compliance was innocent, with the prejudices of their weaker brethren; preferring, rather, to abate some little of their own Christian liberty, than to run the risk, either of leading by their example, those brethren into practices against their private conscience, or, of shocking their settled habits, and of driving them from the Catholic Church, or, it might be, from the profession of Christianity. "We then," he continues, "that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please our-

selves: let every one of us please his neighbour, for his good to edification.”¹

And this rule of conduct he confirms by the example of Christ, whose zeal for the glory of God, and the good of men’s souls, caused him patiently to endure the contradiction of sinners; and of whom it was, for our instruction, long before, foretold by David that he should do so. For “whatsoever things were written aforetime,” he continues, “were written for our learning; that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.” And “the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like minded one towards another; according to Christ Jesus, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God.”²

As if he had said, the main truth, which Scripture teaches us, is the necessity of mutual forbearance; nor can we have hope or comfort from the word of God, unless we also learn patience from it. And may God, whose Holy Ghost gives both patience and consolation, grant, that ye may in perfect charity join each other in His common service and glory. “Wherefore,” for to this point whatever has been said conducts us, “wherefore,” he continues in the words of the text, “receive ye one another, even as Christ also received us to the glory of God.”

¹ Romans, xv. 1, 2.

² Romans, xv. 4—6.

This, then, is the rule with which St. Paul winds up his argument; and this, it is plain, must be understood as a command to tolerate, or put up with, as far as possible, our neighbour's religious errors: and, as an assurance, that not every difference in doctrine, or in ceremony, is sufficient to authorise Christians in separating from each other; and that, where an opinion is harmless, he, who follows it, is, whether right or wrong, to be regarded as a brother in Christ; and, inasmuch as he is weaker in the faith than ourselves, should, in consideration of that very weakness, be treated more tenderly.

The usefulness and timeliness of this advice, when first delivered by St. Paul, you will have already seen from the short account, which I have given, of the disputes which prevailed among the early Christians. And, indeed, no time can be named in the history of the Christian church, during which such a caution, as is here given, would not have been extremely useful and seasonable; since by far the greater number of the quarrels, which have arisen among the household of faith, have arisen from differences of opinion as to subjects as comparatively unimportant, in themselves, as the question whether a man were to dine on pork or on herbs. It is lamentable to tell, that many lives were formerly lost in a quarrel whether Easter should be kept in the same week with the Jewish Passover; or whether its yearly

return should be fixed by another rule : and that among the principal causes which brought on the great rebellion in this country, and the death of King Charles the First on the scaffold, was the offence taken by some serious and melancholy, but narrow-minded persons, at the surplice which, by ancient custom, is worn by our clergy during Divine service. And, though I do not think that religious bitterness of this kind, or to this extent, is a prevailing fault of the present day ; yet are there so many who, for reasons full as trifling, or for no reason at all, desert the communion of the national Church for other and smaller congregations ; and the advice of St. Paul is applicable to so many points of behaviour, which, if not uncharitable in themselves, yet tend to the breach of Christian charity, that our time will not be ill employed in explaining the several cases in which it becomes us to remember this inspired counsel of the Apostle.

In the first place, since the unity of love and faith and worship among Christians was, in the opinion of St. Paul, of so great and exceeding value, that he esteems, as of less consequence even then, that Christian liberty from the Jewish law, which it is the leading object of all his epistles to enforce ; it is certain, that those Christian churches are greatly blameable, which impose, or needlessly retain, such terms of communion as are found by experience to drive away men of tender con-

science from their worship ; and that those private Christians are still more so, who, under the pretence of a tender conscience, or without so good an apology, withdraw themselves without just cause, from the established church and the majority of their fellow Christians, to follow new teachers and attend irregular places of worship. For that the excuses, which are commonly urged for this conduct, are by no means sufficient to justify it, will be apparent, if we recollect that the far greater differences of St. Paul's time were not, by him, accounted sufficient to justify separation. The question then disputed was the continuance, or the destruction, of the whole law of Moses. The reasons, which are most frequently brought, in the present day, for deserting the church in favour of some smaller meeting house, are that the regular clergy, for the most part, write down their sermons, that the prayers of the Church are too long, or that better and more moving preachers are to be found with the dissenters than with us. Now the answer to all these objections, and to every other objection which I have ever heard against the establishment, is that, which the words of St. Paul supply, namely, that, whichever side is right in questions so frivolous, it is better to bear with a small error, than run the danger of a grievous sin ; better to tolerate the harmless superstition of those with whom we worship God, than, by separating from them, to offend

their consciences, and to tear asunder the unity of Christ's flock.

That this was the example which Christ himself, under like circumstances, has set us, we may learn from every page of the Gospel. The church of Israel and Judah, was, in His days, we know, corrupted by many human inventions; and the morals and doctrine of the greater number of its regular teachers must have been, in many points, contemptible to the wisdom, and offensive to the purity, of one so wise and so holy as our Lord. Yet, because that church was established, it was wonderful to observe the Saviour's regularity in His attendance on its sacrifices and its ceremonies, in its synagogues and its temple; how anxious He, on many occasions, showed Himself to avoid giving offence, and, even in ceremonial matters, to fulfil that righteousness of which He needed no supply; and how strongly He enjoins His disciples to observe and obey the commandments of those very scribes and pharisees whose errors and whose evil lives He, elsewhere, reproves so sharply. The mischief of acquiescing in established error, is often far less, than the mischief which arises from attaching too great a value to our own opinions; and it follows that, even if the causes of complaint against our Church were well founded, which I do not think they are, yet, inasmuch as they are not even pretended to be of a kind which endangers the salvation of souls,

those, who separate from us on these accounts, are lamentably negligent of the caution here given by St. Paul. Very strange and terrible things are written in the New Testament against the sin of schism, or causeless separation from our fellow Christians. And it becomes those who thus separate, to have a better and more unavoidable cause of separation to plead, than I have ever heard advanced by those who separate from the Church of England.

But as the meaning of the word “receive,” as we have seen already, is, in this place, to tolerate,—to put up with—nay, in lawful points, as St. Paul’s example shows, to humour—the weakness of our brethren; so is this command of a still more extensive application than that which I have mentioned, and relates not only to the terms of communion with a Church, but to the behaviour which the members of different communions are required, in private life, and in the common intercourse of the world, to observe towards each other; and, more particularly still, to the respect which we are bound to pay to the religious opinions of all men, whether members of the same church with us or no; and whether those opinions be, in our judgement, well founded or no, so long as they are harmless in themselves, and sincerely professed;—and in every case where compliance on our part will not produce a greater evil than contradiction. But this, which is, perhaps, the most practical

part of my subject, would require a greater length, than the present opportunity will afford ; and I shall, therefore, only urge on your attention a few awful considerations, which cannot be too constantly present to our minds, and which naturally arise from the subjects on which I have been discoursing.

In the first place, since the most frequent source of religious disputes is a too great attention to trifles, (or to what are trifles in comparison to the great concerns of a Christian ;) it is plain that the likeliest way to prevent, or to cure them, is to possess our own minds and the minds of those over whom we have influence, with an overpowering and exclusive sense of the mighty things which Christ has done for us ; of the extent of our hope, if we continue in His love, and of the greatness of our danger, if we fall away from it. He, who is, in good earnest, striving for a kingdom, will have little time to criticise the uniform of his fellow soldiers : he, whose eyes and ears and thoughts and heart are bent incessantly on the goodness and glories of a Redeemer, will have neither inclination nor leisure to find fault with such frivolous differences as have given rise to the greater part of Christian schisms. It is remarkable, indeed, that few persecutors have, in their own persons, been men of real holiness. They have been, for the most part, such as strove to hide indulgence to their own faults, under a mask of

severity to those of other men ; ambitious and carnal men, who have made religion a stepping stone to worldly wealth or power ; and who have, themselves, neither believed nor cared for those doctrines which they punished others for refusing. So far from persecution being the fruit of too much zeal in God's cause, it is, for the most part, a sure mark of too little ; and he, who has himself been really made to tremble and to burn with the Seraphim before the Eternal Throne, can hardly either hate, or tyrannise over, his brother.

But, secondly, since a false and frivolous zeal is so apt to insinuate itself into the place of true faith and love, let it be remembered always, that the only mark, by which we can judge or distinguish them, is that charity to man, for the sake of God, without which we may give our body to be burned and our goods to the poor, and remove mountains, and speak with the tongue of men and angels, and yet be offering up a tasteless sacrifice to God, and treasuring up for ourselves rejection and punishment in that day when Christ shall come to cast out the chaff from His threshing floor.

SERMON III.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

1 COR. iv. 5.

Judge nothing before the time until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God.

THE original application of these words, as they are found in that part of St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, which has been this morning read to you from the Communion-table, was to the unjust and uncharitable reflections which had been thrown out against the Apostle himself in the course of those disputes which had agitated the Corinthian Church; and to appease and settle which he sent them this first epistle. It is, therefore, that, while a few verses before, he allows the great necessity and obligation which was laid on the ministers of Christ, and upon himself among the number, to a faithful discharge of their duty, he goes on to tell them, that he, for one, will discharge that duty by the rule of God's will alone, without courting their

praise, and without fearing their blame. "It is required," says he, "in stewards (such as we are) that a man should be found faithful;" but of this faithfulness, he continues, it is of very little consequence what you or I may think. "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you or of man's judgement, yea, I judge not mine own self." I am, indeed, unconscious of having done any thing which could deserve the censures which have been brought against me; but it is not to mine own heart that I would appeal, which may be corrupt or mistaken; but to that Judgement which nothing can escape, and before which I must one day give an account of my whole behaviour. "I know nothing by myself," or, as the Greek words would be more exactly rendered, "I know nothing *against* myself; I am not conscious of any negligence in my duties as an Apostle; yet I am not hereby justified, but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore," he continues in the words of my text, "Therefore, judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God."

In these words there are four things to which I chiefly desire to call your attention, as of the greatest practical consequence to the improve-

ment of your lives, and to your hopes of everlasting happiness. 1st. The caution given against rash and premature judgement, — “judge nothing before the time.” 2nd. The time to which all judgement of men, their motives, and characters should, so far as possible, be deferred, — “till the Lord come.” 3rd. The discovery, which will then be made, of all those particulars, — our ignorance of which, in the present life, must prevent our forming a just opinion of men or things, — “till the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart.” 4th. What is represented as the consequence of this general and glorious light which will be thrown on all our words and thoughts — namely, that not men only shall acknowledge the integrity of the righteous; but that every man, that is, every good man, shall receive an honour, compared to which the loudest applause of men is less than nothing — “Every man shall have praise of God.”

The first of these assertions, that, namely, we are to judge nothing before the time of Christ’s coming in glory, is to be understood, I admit, in a limited sense, and qualified with some exceptions. There are some respects in which every man must judge for himself; and there are some persons whose duty it is to judge, [and to condemn, if found faulty,] the actions of their fellow

creatures. We are expressly commanded to examine our own consciences; to “judge ourselves that we be not judged of the Lord¹;” while “they, who have the rule over us” are, in like manner, authorised and directed to judge righteously, to determine justly and without partiality or prejudice, to be a terror to evil doers, and a praise to them who do well, and, as the ministers of God appointed for this purpose, not to bear the sword in vain, nor allow the guilty to pass unpunished. Nay, St. Paul himself, in this very epistle, imputes it as a reproach to the Corinthians, that there was not one wise man among them who was able to judge his brethren²; and himself, though absent, yet by his apostolical authority, pronounces in the fifth chapter a very severe judgement against the person who “had his father’s wife.”³ It is plain, then, that nothing, which is said here, can be meant to forbid self-examination, or judgement by a lawful authority. Nor can this caution be intended entirely to take away that right of private judgement, which every man is in the habit of exercising, on the outward actions and behaviour of those with whom he dwells: and that, for the following reasons: —

In the first place, while men are men, to deprive them of this liberty would be impossible. It is a necessary consequence of the faculties

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 31.

² 1 Cor. vi. 5.

³ 1st verse.

which God has given us ; and which, in a great measure, distinguish us from the brute creation ; that we not only see, but compare, and comparing, judge men's actions with one another, and with those notions of right and wrong which we have received both from nature and from revelation. We cannot help seeing that men differ greatly from each other. We cannot help judging that such men are right, and such others wrong, in their respective lines of behaviour ; and, therefore, it was that our Saviour himself rebuked the Jews for not making a proper use of their natural powers of distinguishing between good and evil, when He said, " Why, even of your own selves, do ye not judge the thing that is right ? " And, secondly, this use of our natural reason and observation, in judging the conduct and character of men, is not only allowed, but commanded. We are commanded in many, very many passages of Scripture, to shun the company and conversation of the wicked. But how are we to shun the wicked, unless we first determine who is wicked, and who is not ? or how are we to do this without judging them ? So plain it is that neither examination of ourselves, nor the exercise of a lawful authority in the judgement of offenders, nor the exercise of the natural right of private opinion can, within reasonable limits, be held up to reprobation in Scripture.

What then, can be intended by the Apostle, when he thus commands us to “judge nothing before the time, till the Lord come?”

I answer, in the first place, all rash and uncharitable judgement is hereby condemned; all censure, that is, of a man's conduct or principles, which arises either from a hasty or an angry view of them, or from a prejudice against his person. We may lawfully think ill of a man, because, under certain circumstances, it becomes our duty to warn others against him. But we cannot, without a great sin, do either the one or the other of these, unless we are first well persuaded in our minds, [and persuaded, on some probable grounds,] that the man is really such a person as we represent him. We must not do, what is too often done, first take a dislike on trifling grounds; and then feed that dislike in our hearts, and justify it to ourselves and others by aggravating our neighbour's failings, by imputing to him actions of which we do not know that he is guilty, and motives of which we cannot know any thing. If we feel any personal dislike towards him, that very consciousness should act as a warning to be more slow in our suspicions, more cautious, more charitable in our expressions concerning him. And, secondly, all unnecessary judgement or censure is forbidden. It may be impossible, as I have already observed, to avoid thinking evil of our neighbour, if tha

neighbour's ill conduct is so necessarily thrown in our way as that we cannot avoid observing it. It may be not only lawful, but our duty to speak ill of our neighbour, when our opinion is asked concerning him by those who have a right to ask it; or when we are called on in justice or in charity towards others to warn them against his arts or his example. But it is a plain transgression of the Apostle's counsel when we covet and seek out for ourselves the office of judge; when we inquire into those faults and follies, which no ways concern us; or, when having, on whatever grounds, conceived an unfavourable opinion of our neighbour, we blazon that opinion abroad in all companies, and under circumstances where no consequence can follow but mischief to him; and to ourselves, the gratification of foolish vanity or fiendish malice.

So far, then, as we have yet seen, it may be said, that we are forbidden to judge, in the same way and under the same limitations as we are forbidden to kill. A private man may kill where it is necessary for his own defence, or the defence of his innocent friend; a ruler or prince may kill, and may find it his duty to kill, when he is called on to do so by the laws of God, or of the nation wherein he bears authority. And, in like manner, a judge is, by the nature and name of his office, called on to pass censure on such actions as come before him in that capacity; and a

private person must do so, when his own situation, or that of his friends, requires it of him ; but all rash judgement, all prejudice or malicious judgement is forbidden ; no less than all rash, all malicious, and all unnecessary shedding of the blood of our fellow-creatures.

But there is yet another rule, which we should observe, to make our judgement lawful or blameless. Our judgement of our neighbours should not be positive. We should ever recollect that, in spite of all appearances, we *may* be mistaken ; and, recollecting this, we should always lean to the favourable side. “ It may be,” we should always think with ourselves, “ it may be, he hath not done or said it ;” — “ it may be, he hath not meant it ;” — “ it may be, he was deceived ;” — “ it may be, he hath repented ;” — “ it may be, if we deal gently with him, he may yet repent and be saved.” And if we really desire our neighbour’s salvation, if we really love him as ourselves, or are really desirous of doing to him as we would be done by, we shall be well enough inclined, in almost every case, to hope and believe such things concerning him ; and not only to speak of him, but to feel towards him charitably.

And to this habit of, so far as possible, suspending our unfavourable judgement of other men, nothing can so much contribute as the constant recollection of that awful time, when the great Judge of heaven and earth shall return in might

and majesty to take account of the souls which His blood hath purchased. It would, even in this world, be accounted an act of great presumption and injustice to prejudge the case, and take for granted the guilt of any man whose trial for life and death was shortly to come on before the regular and lawful magistrate. And this presumption and injustice would appear still greater, if we ourselves were likewise to take our trial at the same time, and were actually in fear of the same condemnation which we were so ready to call down on the head of our neighbour. How much more should this consideration weigh with us, who, together with that neighbour, are shortly to stand before the judgement seat of Christ, the searcher of hearts, the Master and Lord of all, who hath the keys of death and of hell; and to whom men may be well content to resign all censure of their neighbours, seeing that God the Father Himself judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgement unto the Son! Surely, with these expectations, we shall do well to profit by the counsel of the Apostle,—to “judge nothing before the time, —until the Lord come;” and by the warning of that blessed Lord Himself, that “with what judgement we judge, we shall ourselves be judged.”

And, further, we may be the more easily inclined to suspend in this manner our opi-

nions; when we compare the great darkness and uncertainty of the best judgement which is in our power to form, with that clearness of truth and certainty with which the Judge of heaven and earth shall one day determine on the conduct and character of every man. Our judgements are built on appearances only, in themselves often deceitful; our judgements are liable to be warped, even against our will and without our knowledge, by many, very many circumstances of human passion and infirmity, by our likings or dislikes, by the state of our bodily health, by the bias of our education, by our rank in life, by the good or bad humour in which we happen to be at the time. We cannot but be ignorant of the state of our neighbour's soul, of the motives on which he has acted, of the opportunities of grace which have been offered or denied to him, of how far we ourselves might have been able to withstand the like temptation with that under which he has fallen. But none of our infirmities, none of our difficulties, can beset the sentence of that Almighty Wisdom, which "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart;"—in that Day, when there "is nothing hid which shall not be known;" and "when that which was whispered in the ear shall be proclaimed publicly to men and angels." And, sensible as we must be of our

present darkness, and looking forwards as we do, to a light so great and glorious, is it too much to wait a little while without judging, seeing that we shall be shortly enabled to determine exactly whatever now perplexes us? Or shall we not, instead of finding fault with our brethren, be diligent in so ruling our own hearts, our words and actions, as that we may be conscious of nothing of which we shall blush to give account, in the great assembly of good men made perfect, and in the presence of that God whom none but the pure in heart can bear to look upon? Or can we avoid considering, — which is the last lesson which I would desire to impress on your minds from these words of St. Paul, — of how little consequence is the judgement or opinion of men, to those who are hastening, as we all are, to that last great trial of our lives and characters, when both shall be pronounced either blessed or cursed, by an all-seeing, all-wise, all-mighty Sovereign?

Is it not strange that men, calling themselves Christians, should be distressed at every turn by fears of what the world will say, — by anxiety to be well thought of among their neighbours; — that they should be so careful to hide their sins and follies from mankind; and yet never recollect that the Day must come when all those sins and follies, the recollection of which, even now, makes their cheeks burn with shame, will be

made known to all men in their true colours? Is it not strange, that a desire of the praise of men, or a fear of their laughter, should keep us back from doing that which our soul approves, and which we know would, one day, obtain for us the praise of that Being, compared with whom ten thousand worlds are less than nothing? “Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of? It is a very small thing that we should be judged of man’s judgement; for He that judgeth us is the Lord, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart,” in that day when “every man shall have praise of God:” and when they, whom the erring judgement of their brethren has overlooked or blindly censured, shall receive from the lips of Power that sentence which is the key of everlasting life, — “Well done, thou good and faithful servant!”

SERMON IV.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

PHIL. iv. 5.

The Lord is at hand.

NOTWITHSTANDING the shortness of that portion of Scripture, which has been read as the Epistle of this morning, it comprises in itself more comfortable truths, and more wholesome counsels, than can be found, expressed with equal force and elegance, in many far longer compositions. It gives us a statement of that temper of mind, which the contemplation of our Lord's return to judge the world should produce and promote in the bosom of every Christian ; — the holy joy, the indifference to this world and to all which it offers, and the perfect reliance on God which casts all our care on Him, and in the hour of trouble flies to prayer as to a sure and holy refuge. “ Rejoice in the Lord alway ; ” “ let your moderation be known unto all men ; the Lord is at hand ; be careful for nothing ; but, in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. ” These are the rules which the Apostle lays down for

the government of the Christian heart : and if we follow, in our customary thoughts, and deeds, and words of every day, these plain directions of the Holy Ghost, blessed indeed is the promise made to us ; if, knowing these truths, we act accordingly, “the peace of God,” we are told, shall cheer and strengthen us in the troubles of our mortal life ; and, with a power which none can imagine or understand, “shall keep our hearts and minds” from doubt and danger, through the merits of Jesus Christ.

But the reason given by St. Paul for our hoping for this great comfort of God’s grace, and for our own fulfilling these three several rules of daily behaviour, is one and the same tremendous and awful truth, contained in the words which I have more particularly chosen for my text, “The Lord is at hand.” Why else is the Christian twice commanded to rejoice in his faith, and in the prospect of eternal happiness ; but because the Lord is about to return, by whose mercy that happiness will be bestowed ? Why are we exhorted to be moderate in all our desires and in all our earthly feelings ; but because the fashion of this world is so soon to pass away, and that while we speak, the day of the Lord may be at hand ? Why are we to be careful for nothing, but to continue instant in prayer ; except because the Lord our Saviour is at hand to wipe away all tears from our eyes, and because it is fit to watch and pray for His expected return ?

Why, lastly, have we reason to hope for the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit, but through our faith in Him who sits at the right hand of Eternal Majesty, and who has promised His disciples to send us his Holy Spirit to help our infirmities, till He shall himself return again ?

For all these, the reason is the same ; “ the Lord,” says his Apostle, “ the Lord is at hand ;” and, since on this truth our actions and our hopes in so great a degree depend, the time will not be ill applied, which is given to examine and explain the several manners in which we may interpret the assurance given us in Scripture of the speedy return of Christ to earth : since our English Church, and almost every other society of Christians in the world, have appointed in their public service, a certain number of Sundays at this time of the year, to prepare our minds by appropriate prayers, and by awakening passages of Scripture, for the due celebration of the birthday of our Lord, for the recollection of His first coming to visit us in great humility, and for the awful reflection that the time may even now be speedily approaching, when He shall return in His glorious Majesty to judge both the quick and the dead.

These Sundays are called by a Latin word, the *Advent*, or Coming of Christ ; and you will accordingly observe, on looking back to the collects of the present Sunday, and of the three which are

past, that it is to this object that our thoughts and our prayers have been directed. The proper lessons have all been chosen from the prophecies of Isaiah, in which, in dark, but awful language, the dreadful Day of the LORD is foretold. In the Epistles, or in the Gospels, or in both of them, some hint is ever found adapted to the season, and calling on us to forsake the works of darkness, and to prepare ourselves by true repentance and by earnest supplication to God, that we, through His grace, may be found in the number of those happy saints, who, when the Son of Man shall descend in a cloud with power and great glory, shall burst forth into that majestic anthem of hope and happiness, "Blessed is he, that cometh in the name of the Lord!"

I have thought it right to explain thus shortly the meaning of the Advent Sundays, and the wise intention of our Church in appointing them: and I now return to the awful subject of my present sermon, viz. what we are to understand by the different promises, made in Scripture, of the speedy return of Jesus Christ to earth. Do not, however, expect, my friends, that I shall venture with audacious confidence to explain the signs of the times of God's great victory; that I shall wrest the prophecies to private or political interpretation; or that I shall strive to rend the veil of a dreadful futurity, and to count the seasons to that

day and hour of which no one knoweth but the Father. Sufficient for us to meditate on those awful truths which are really revealed to us for our use and learning; to be the light to our paths, and the guide to our actions; and that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.

And, of all these truths, there is none more frequently insisted on by Christ, and by His Apostles, than the one on which we are now discoursing. The Prophets Ezekiel, Daniel, and Isaiah often delight to speak of it; but the promises in the Gospel are clear and positive. "Hereafter," says Christ to Nathaniel, "hereafter ye shall see Heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."¹ "A little while," in another place we read His words, "a little while, and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while, and ye shall see me."² To the High Priest also, when he asked Him, whether He were the Christ, the Son of the blessed, our Lord replies — as a proof that He was so, — that those, who now rejected Him, should behold Him hereafter, "sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven."³

It is useless to multiply examples in a point so clear. I shall only add, that the angels foretold to the Apostles that, in like manner as

¹ St. John, i. 51.

² St. John, xvi. 16.

³ St. Matt. xxvi. 64.

Christ had ascended to Heaven, so He should at length return again¹: that in the Revelations, Christ, then glorified, gave the same assurance to His beloved disciple² St. John: that all the Apostles point to the same dreadful period: and that the most solemn ordinance of our religion, the Sacrament of The Lord's Supper, is said by St. Paul to be a picture and representation of our Saviour's sufferings; to remind us of Him during His absence, and "to show forth the Lord's death till He come."

Of all these texts the application is plain and easy; they all refer to the last Great Day, when Christ shall return to judge the quick and the dead: when heaven and earth shall fly away before His face; when all the dead, small and great, shall stand in the presence of the Lord, and He shall place the good on His right hand, and the wicked on His left. But all the texts relating to this second coming are not so easy to be explained as these are. There is a real difficulty which many may have felt, (I have felt it myself; and be assured, that the reasoning, by which I was not satisfied, I would never offer to you), that, in many of these prophecies of Christ's return to earth, an almost immediate return is promised and foretold. "I come quickly," said our Lord, already glorified, to the beloved author of the Revelations.³ "If I will that he

¹ Acts, i. 11.

² Rev. i. 7.

³ Rev. iii. 11.

tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"¹ "There be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."² "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."³

Now, in all these expressions, at first sight a very considerable difficulty is involved. How can Christ have performed His promise, "to come quickly," when eighteen hundred years have passed away since that promise was made? How did St. John tarry till His return, when St. John is long since laid to sleep in the grave? How were His words fulfilled in the presence of that particular generation, while the world still endures; though thirty generations, reckoned at sixty years a piece, have since been turned into dust? This was, we find, from the second epistle of St. Peter⁴, an objection which, even in his time, was made to the Gospel. Even then there were scoffers who mocked at the promise of Christ's coming; and observed, that, since the fathers fell asleep, all things continued in the same course which they kept of old. And the objection which was then, undoubtedly, premature, may seem to have obtained some strength at the present day, by the number of years which have gone by. But a careful consideration of the texts of Scrip-

¹ St. John, xxi. 22.

² St. Mark, ix. 1.

³ St. Matt. xxiv. 34.

⁴ 2 St. Peter, iii. 4.

ture, in which these promises are made, will enable the commonest and plainest understanding to perceive what is really meant by them, and to answer all objections made against their authority.

First, it will be well to observe, that the promises which were made eighteen hundred years ago, [that persons, then alive, should not leave the world before He returned to take vengeance on His enemies,] might be very completely fulfilled in another manner besides the end of the world and the last great judgement. I have, on former occasions, mentioned to you the manner in which Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Temple made a heap of ruins, not many years after our Saviour was put to death ; and while many were, doubtless, still alive, who had remembered Him on earth, and had joined, perhaps, in the cry of “Crucify Him.” On that occasion, we know from history, that all those dreadful signs took place, which our Saviour had foretold to His disciples. There were earthquakes in divers places ; there were wonderful appearances in the sun, and the moon, and the stars ; nation rose against nation ; and the wickedness and misery of all mankind, and of the Jewish people in particular, appeared to have reached its full. And such was the vengeance which overtook the murderous Israelites, that no less than two millions of men and women died by the sword or by hunger (many devouring their own children for want) : the remainder were

all sent into slavery ; and their city and temple were made a heap of undistinguished ruins. Now, that this was the destruction, thus foretold and thus accomplished, we may well believe, though Christ did not then Himself visibly appear : for, though He was not there in bodily presence, yet was He surely there in power. It was His vengeance which trod the winepress of anger alone ; it was His hand which darted the thunder, and which shook the world ; and which destroyed those murderers, and burnt their city with fire ; and which, by thus fulfilling His prophecy, and by breaking down the last remains of the Jewish altar and of the second temple, established the truth of His religion, and made it plain to all the world that no other Messiah could be expected besides Him.

Nor, in calling this act of Christ's power His "*coming*," do we use improper or unusual language. Sudden death or grievous afflictions are called by us, without objection, the "*visitation*" of God ; and this great judgement which then befel the Jews, by the anger, and according to the promise of Jesus, may well be called, above all other afflictions which the world ever saw, the "*coming*" or visitation of Christ.

The promise, then, of a dreadful visitation in power and vengeance, within a few years after our Lord's crucifixion, was truly and terribly fulfilled : and there will only remain to be considered

those general prophecies of a speedy return to judgement, to which the scoffers in St. Peter's time objected. Now, to this St. Peter himself affords a sufficient answer: namely, that the Eternal God and we short-lived creatures have far different notions of time, and quickness, and delay. A thousand years and a single day are equally a speck and a mere moment, in comparison of that age which never has an end, and of that eternal NOW of happiness or of misery, which heaven or hell will offer. The end of the world, and Christ's return to judgement, will come quite soon enough for those who are then to begin an eternity of happiness; and far too soon for the miserable criminals whose never-dying flame must then be kindled.

The day of Christ's return to judgement continues, then, a secret; but, happen when it will, the time must be short indeed in comparison of the everlasting ages which are to follow. But to us frail and miserable creatures, tottering even now on the brink of the grave, little, very little, does it signify, so far as we ourselves are concerned, how much sooner or later the end of the world may come. We must ourselves be called away from earth; our happiness or misery must be fixed ere many years, or days, or moments pass over our heads; and if God this night requires our souls, it signifies little to us how long the generations of the world may afterwards con-

tinue. To all of us the Lord, indeed, is at hand. To all of us judgement is coming quickly. Nor, since the hour of that tremendous second coming of our Lord is wrapt in darkness, and is to be looked for "as a thief in the night," can we, if we have any care for our own safety, or for the earnest caution of our Saviour, desist for a single moment to watch for its coming. Even now, the sign of the Son of Man may be about to appear in heaven; even now, we may be suddenly alarmed by the sight of that mighty Angel, who shall "set his right foot upon the sea, and his left on the earth," and swear by Him that liveth for ever and ever that there should be time no longer.¹ Even while I speak (it is a thought which cannot but fill us all with terror) we may hear the last trumpet sound;—and be called from this assembly to the vast congregation of men and angels, and the Glorious and Almighty Judge. And when we compare, for a moment, the signs, which that Judge has given us of His second coming, with those marvels and sorrows and visitations which are now passing in the world, could we have a right to be astonished, if the world were now, indeed, approaching to its end? When God has so long knocked at the door of His creation, can that creation find any excuse for not being prepared to receive Him! Oh, may our loins be girt about, and may our lights be

¹ Rev. x. 2—6.

burning; and let us not be found in sluggishness or sin, when our Lord shall return to shake terribly the earth!

In conclusion, my friends, since all these things are to be dissolved, what manner of men ought we not to be in holiness and pureness of living? How careless of this world, which may not, perhaps, last out a single evening longer; how anxious to redeem every moment of time, when the moments may be, perhaps, so few; how constantly should we meditate on Christ, when He is, perhaps, even now at hand; and how earnest should we be in prayer to Him for His almighty help, to keep us in the hour of death, and in the Day of Judgement! Above all, we should ask ourselves in every action of our lives, whether this, which we are then going to do, is such an act as we should desire to remember at that time when the dead, small and great, shall stand before the presence of God! Is it an action which we shall call on the rocks and the mountains to hide from the sight of the Lamb? or is it such an one as will not misbecome those servants who shall rejoice, and lift up their heads when their redemption draweth nigh?

Come when it will, we must all stand before the judgement-seat of Christ; and for His glorious return all created things are in earnest expectation of travail: for this the souls of the righte-

ous pray from their dwelling beneath the altar¹; for this the angels hope, and the Spirit and the Universal Church say, Come! Behold, He cometh quickly, and His reward is with Him. The Lord is at hand!

To Him, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, praise, and glory!

¹ Rev. vi. 9, 10.

SERMON V.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

ISAIAH, xxxviii. 1.

Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.

THESE words were a message sent from God to king Hezekiah in his sickness; and they contain a warning, which, whether in sickness or in health, is, in a certain sense, applicable to us all. It becomes us all to bear in mind the common sentence of mortality, which, for Adam's sin, the Almighty has passed on His creatures; and to maintain, at all times, such order in our spiritual and worldly affairs, as that death, whenever he knocks at our door, may find us not unprepared to obey his summons.

But if it be the universal interest and duty of men, even the youngest and most strong, to prepare their minds for death, and to set all things in order lest that day should take them unawares; yet are they, more especially and more perceptibly, called to turn their thoughts to the subject, who are visited, even now, by the forerunners and harbingers of death; whose strength is brought low, and their beauty

minished by accident or by disease ; and whose painful limbs, and burning hands, and dim eye, and aching head, and sleepless nights, already warn them, as with a voice of thunder, to prepare themselves ; to set their houses and their hearts in order ; and while they yet have time, and while their Judge yet standeth before the door, to seek, by earnest prayer, and by repentance unfeigned and speedy, either a reprieve of their sentence, or that favour of the Lord by which their sentence will be made the source of blessedness.

And the truth is, that, — some few cases excepted, in which the hardness of men's nature has led them to a desperate defiance of God's terrors, or their ignorance and levity has caused in them a childish and fatal neglect of His threats and warnings, — with some few such exceptions, — the minds of men are, of themselves, sufficiently disposed to turn, in their pain and apparent peril, to that God who hath smitten and who only can make them whole ; and to betake themselves to religion as a last ground of hope when all earthly comforts fail them. And thus it is, that, in the afflictions which God sends us, His great mercy is made visible : and thus it is, that “ whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.”¹ Many there have been who have trod the paths of

¹ Proverbs, iii. 12.

folly and of sin, till some gracious sickness, like a good but severe schoolmaster, has called back the truants from their perilous wanderings; and has instructed them in their best and most lasting interests; and has taught them by times the worthlessness of those guilty pleasures, and of those fleshly or worldly hopes, which have flattered only to destroy them. Many there have been, and some whom I myself have known and know, who have acknowledged with thankful tears, that it has been “good for them that they have been afflicted:” and that the loss of limbs, of health, and even of friends, has been a cheap and blessed payment for the knowledge of their own hearts, and the hopes and comforts of religion.

But, the misfortune is, that, partly from ignorance and former inattention to serious things, partly from disturbance of mind, and from allowing the immediate sufferings of the body, and the immediate apprehension of death to engross the attention, rather than those considerations of God’s mercy and justice and wisdom and power, and those truths of the Gospel, which, whether in health or sickness, are the great and only sources of spiritual instruction and consolation, very few, when thus called on, know how to set about the work, which they are then ready to allow to be most urgent and most necessary. Even they, whose former faith and

former conduct have been such, as on the whole to give no cause for peculiar terrors, are often so confused in their recollections, so stunned by the suddenness of the warning, and so agitated by the various regrets, and hopes, and doubts, and confidence, and sense of former guilt, and trust of present acceptance, and knowledge of their own vileness, and reliance on the Redeemer's mercy, and all mixed up with the sense of bodily pain, and with the love of those worldly objects which have been most dear to them, and from which they must now depart — to meet, perhaps, no more, — that even Religion itself is not able, as they apply it, to tranquillise them; or to instruct them in making such an use of their present condition as may be most likely, if they live, to make their lives, thenceforth, more pure and holy; or, if they die, to rob death of his sting, and turn the king of terrors into a messenger of peace and of rest and of immortality. I am anxious, therefore, to employ the present opportunity in giving to those, who are yet in health, such hints for their behaviour under sickness, as may turn the severest dispensations of God, as God intends they should be turned, into means of improvement and of blessing. I am anxious to teach those, who may be visited with the solemn warnings of mortality, in what manner they may best set themselves and their affairs in order; how they

may best trim their lamps when the bridegroom cometh ; and may take their leave of the present life, and may enter on the life to come, in the temper, and with the hopes and the humility, of a Christian.

The first act of the mind on being attacked by sickness, or on receiving any other warning of our mortal and most frail condition, should be always an act of recollection ; a solemn, that is, a sober meditation on the power and wisdom and goodness of the Most High ; in whose hands alone we are ; who can kill, and make alive ; from whose will this accident or distemper has, most certainly, proceeded ; and who may even now, according to our behaviour under it, convert it either to our happiness or to our destruction. The effect of these considerations will be, not (as one ignorant of the human heart might fancy) to increase our terrors and uneasiness ; but, by drawing off our attention from those bodily pains and dangers, which surround us, to that All-perfect Being by whom they are inflicted, and in whose absolute disposal we are, — to enable us to repress the impatience of pain and alarm, and to awe us into a kind of tranquillity. Where struggling is vain, patience becomes a more easy lesson : and that “ God wills it, — and who can stand against His will ? ” — is a consideration, which will lead us, both to submit with more temper and mildness to what-

ever means are prescribed for our recovery ; and also to wait their event with less querulous eagerness, than if we bounded our thoughts by the pangs which we endure, or by the earthly succours whereby we hope to escape or lessen them. There is something soothing, as well as sublime, in the contemplation of greatness and power. We feel it when we gaze on the great works of nature. He whose heart expatiates in the prospect of the ocean, or of the starry heaven, is for a time insensible to his own resentments or misfortunes ; and is identified, as it were, with the glorious and tranquil scene before him. One of the principal joys of Heaven, we are told, is the delight of gazing upon God ; and, even in this state of mortal darkness and misery, if we can, for a time, so forsake the thoughts of earthly things, as in faith and fancy to behold Him ; to call up to our mind whatever images of greatness and power and perfection the Scripture has, however darkly, revealed to us concerning Him ; our heart will be filled, as by necessity, with love and admiration for an object so glorious ; and our resignation to His decree will become a matter, not only of necessity, but, in some respects, of choice.

Nor is this all ; for when we turn our thoughts from the infinite power and majesty of God, to his infinite goodness and mercy ; when we recollect that this Almighty Being has humbled himself to behold and to pity the meanest and

the most ungrateful of his creatures ; that for the sins of the world, yea, for our sins, He hath not spared to deliver his own Son ; when we behold that blessed Son, Himself a portion of His substance, His Word, and the brightness of His glory, brought down by his love for man, from that dazzling height to the form of a mortal, and to the shame of a malefactor, — our ransom then from his Father's justice, and now at his Father's right hand, our advocate and mediator ; when, lastly, we behold the Spirit of God, peculiarly called the Spirit of grace, and love, and comfort, pervading all space, and shedding His influence through all creation ; when we acknowledge that the mercy of God has been so richly displayed in all his dealings with all his works ; it is impossible, I conceive, for even the most undone sinner to despair entirely, or to repress a hope, that from the Infinite of Love some rays, however faint, may fall upon his darkness. Nor, in thus hoping, would even such a sinner err. The very hope itself, if he had power to entertain it, as it could only proceed from grace, would be a proof that he was not quite abandoned. His love for God thus revived would be, in truth, nothing else than the faint reflections of that love which God bore for him ; and whose light, though our sins, like clouds, have long intercepted it, need only shine on the soul to bring forth fruits of holiness.

And this may show the unreasonableness of their conduct, who, in the beginning of sickness, and when the warnings of death are more distant and uncertain, drive away all serious thoughts from the soul, through a fear of injuring the body, and are afraid of meditating on even the possibility of soon standing before God, lest such a meditation should hasten the event to which it calls their attention. Even if this were necessarily the case, the risk is so far less in dying soon, than in dying unprepared, that the former danger should be cheerfully encountered, rather than incur the possibility of the latter. Yet, in truth, the cases of sickness are very few, in which, at the beginning of a disorder, religious considerations, such as I have now instanced, can do our bodily health any harm. On the contrary, that awe and tranquillity of soul, which are induced by them, may, in many cases, be of real advantage ; while it is, at all events, better to perform these most necessary duties in the beginning of a disorder, than to defer them to a time when our state is visibly perilous ; and when the urgent necessity of such thoughts, and the little time which we have for them, may well be expected to press too strongly on the nerves, and to lessen by that pressure our natural chances of recovery. But to return from this digression.

When our minds are thus sobered, and in some measure composed, by a due consideration of our

total dependence on God, — of His almighty power, and of His infinite mercy, — it must be next, and it will be very naturally our care, to consider what means are yet within our reach to interest that power and mercy in our favour; how, even in the storms of this life, we may cling to the rock of our safety, and, in the valley of the shadow of death, be comforted and supported by the staff of our Heavenly Shepherd. And this may best be accomplished by repentance; to which an examination of our past lives is, in the first place, absolutely necessary. In our conduct of this inquiry, it is well, however, to attend to the following cautions.

First, it is highly probable, nay it is almost certain under such circumstances, that the review of our past behaviour will be, even to the best of us, extremely painful and humiliating, as well as alarming; and we shall be tempted to escape from the bitter recollection of our sins, by turning to those actions of our lives which wear a better appearance; and by attempting to strike such a balance between our evil and our good deeds, as may enable us to look forwards with less terror to the account which we have soon to render. But this must be at all events avoided. The very attempt to do so, the attempt to reason with our Judge, and to prepare beforehand the plea which we shall offer to him, will, of itself,

extremely agitate the soul and the bodily frame, and render both the one and the other less fit for death, and less likely to escape death. And, above all, the attempt to plead our own good deeds in extenuation of our sins, must be extremely offensive to God, who has repeatedly refused in Scripture to admit any human merit, or any other call on his favour than our utter misery, and the merits and mediation of our Saviour. By flinging ourselves entirely on His mercy, we shall place our confidence where it will not be thrown away : we shall escape much present misery, and the alarm to which any reliance on our own efforts will expose us ; and we shall escape that indignation which the Lord of life and death must feel against an insolvent debtor who should presume to reckon up his little services, and to bring forward his pitiful efforts as claims against Him to whom his all was due. And on this account I would advise the sick man to abstain entirely from all thought or recollection of what he may suppose the praiseworthy parts of his character. It can do him no good to recollect them ; since God knows them already, and needs not to be put in mind. And it *may*, nay *must* do him harm ; inasmuch as it will take off his attention from a work for which his time is but too short, and will lead him, perhaps, to seek for comfort in things which cannot

profit, instead of in that boundless mercy of God through his Son, in whose name alone there is salvation.

2dly. While the sick penitent thus abstains from all mention or notice of his own virtues, he will do well not to be too particular, or dwell too long in his recapitulation of such of his sins as are gone by and not to be remedied. For these regret, however natural, is useless, and, beyond a certain degree, injurious. A deep sense of his own unworthiness and sinfulness; a thorough conviction that he has no hope but in God's free mercy, — this is necessary; and for this a very general recollection of our lives will be sufficient. But to indulge in the horrid details of an ill-spent life; to paint, in exaggerated colours, the circumstances of each transgression is not only a loss of time, and distressing ourselves in vain, but it is a very frequent snare of our enemy to plunge us into utter desperation and abandonment of ourselves, and of all those means of escape and salvation which the merciful grace of the Holy Ghost may, even yet, extend to us. Nor is this the worst. It is not impossible that, with such recollections, a guilty pleasure may revive in our soul; that our fancy may return, with more regret than horror, to the scenes of our former enjoyment; and that, while we suppose ourselves to be mourning for

sin, we are, in truth, only concerned that we must now give it up for ever.

3dly. However, while the sick man withdraws his attention from all those evil works which are gone by and not to be remedied, he should be more anxious to recollect those others, if any there are, for which he has it in his power to make reparation. If he has been, in any part of his life, an open blasphemer of God, and an unbeliever in the Scripture, it behoves him to lose no time in humbly and openly acknowledging his error, and in cautioning his fellow-creatures against the like dangerous delusion! If, by his bad example or wicked persuasions, he has led others into sin, let him now, as he values their souls or his own, so far as he possibly can, undo the mischief which he has occasioned. If he has injured, by word or deed, any of his neighbours, let him, while life is yet allowed to him, make the best amends in his power, and, on no account, neglect, what is in the power of every man, a free confession and an humble petition for their forgiveness. If he is in possession of any property dishonestly obtained, whether by himself or by others, let him make haste to give up the accursed thing, either to the rightful owners, or, if they cannot be found, to the poor; lest a curse, like that of Naboth's vineyard, cleave to him and his posterity, and lest the goods, which he will not restore, be as garments of

fire to his soul in the day of God's vengeance. If he is conscious of bearing ill-will to any man, let him wipe out from his heart all remembrance of injuries received, and renounce all intention of future revenge; and express, openly, to those around him, his forgiveness of all his enemies, even as he hopes that God, for Christ's sake, will extend to him forgiveness. If, lastly, which is, in itself, a crime as well as a great misfortune, he has hitherto left his worldly affairs unsettled, let him not be influenced by any foolish fear of alarming his family, or of appearing alarmed himself, from immediately making such a disposition of his property as he shall, in his conscience, think most righteous and best, and such an one as he may not fear to give an account of, in the hour of judgement.

And for these employments he will be the better qualified, if, in the 4th place, he makes up his mind to renounce the world entirely, and all restless hope of life and recovery, resigning all his prospects entirely into the hand of God, who is best acquainted with our wants, and with the wants of those whom we are about to leave behind; and who is infinitely able to protect and provide for us and them. Do we fear for the dismal consequences which our death will produce on the fortunes of those whom we love? Let us remember that, whether we die or live, their happiness must depend on God's blessing

and protection ; and that this protection and blessing may be extended to them alike in the one case as in the other. If we cast our care on God, we may be sure that He will care for us ; and that He, who feedeth the young ravens who call on Him, will not fail to raise up friends to the widow and the fatherless. Lastly, that our meditations may become holy and comfortable ; and our repentance sincere and effectual ; and our restitution humble and public ; and our charity pure and edifying ; and our justice without taint ; and our resignation without reserve ; our every day, our every night, our every hour and minute, so long as our senses continue, and so much as we can spare from the exercise of those duties which I have noticed, should be given up to public or private prayer. Prayer should waken the sick man in the morning ; should lull him to rest at night ; should watch by his midnight pillow ; should soothe his bodily pain ; should welcome his bodily amendment ; should sanctify his physic ; should relish his food ; should give fervour to his last advice, and power to his last blessing. When he cannot read himself, his friends should read to him ; when their voices fail, or they harass him, his thoughts should follow the same employment ; not asking for life, or, at most, only asking for it as an inferior consideration ; not asking for bodily ease, or, if his pains constrain him,

adding to each petition the clause of "Thy will be done;" but asking for faith, for patience, for hope, for pardon, for a share in the mercies of Christ;—content to lose all, to leave all, to suffer all, so that the one thing needful be secured to him by his Heavenly Guardian, and his soul preserved from the snare of the fowler.

For the guidance and furtherance of such his devotions, I need hardly add the propriety of sending for the minister of the church to which he belongs, and of publicly acknowledging his faith and Christian hope, by partaking in the Christian sacraments. I have only to regret, that this is too often delayed to the last; and that relations and friends are unwilling, for so long a time, to have recourse to our labours. They are afraid, it seems, of alarming and agitating the patient; but that alarm and agitation, which may well be great when the arrival of the priest and the sacrament is considered as the forerunner of death, would be entirely, or in a great measure, prevented by sending for him in the beginning of an illness. But, however that may be, it is a very bad sign when this measure is postponed; and many a friend and relative have mourned, with most bitter tears, their own backwardness in preparing their sick brethren for the grave, when those brethren have slipped out of their hands, untaught, unwarned, unconfessed, un comforted!

Having thus spoken of the duties incumbent on the sick and the dying, it yet remains, that I give a few cautions against the sins to which they are most exposed. And those sins are evil and trifling thoughts, unthankfulness, impatience, peevishness, and hypocrisy. To the two first of these men are often strangely liable, on any remission of present pain, or on any appearance of approaching amendment; insomuch that we shall often have reason to wonder at ourselves—how strangely our love of forbidden or unreasonable indulgences will revive; how apt we are to act over in our thoughts what we have professed to give up for ever; and how apt to lose sight, in our renewed worldly hopes, of that Heavenly Being to whom we owe every thing. And there is no other cure for these infirmities than an immediate return to prayer and divine meditation, driving out the present tempter by the recollection of our late peril and sufferings, and the probability there always must be that our present relief is a respite only, not a total remission of God's sentence. The same meditations on God, and his power and goodness, will also help us to keep from murmuring and ill temper; more especially, if we reflect on the sufferings which our Saviour Christ endured for us, and the reasonableness that we, who are sinners, should the rather bear our burden patiently.

Hypocrisy may seem a strange vice to impute

to a sick or dying person. It is far more common, however, than an inattentive observer would suppose ; and is shown either in seeking compassion and kindness by counterfeiting the appearance of greater suffering than really belongs to our cases, or in the affectation of more faith, more Christian resignation, more Christian humility and self-abasement, and a conscience more void of offence, than either our own hearts or God will sanction. The first of these differs so little from positive fraud, and springs so plainly from a too great attention to bodily comfort, and too little regard for the soul, that no more need be said than that its proper cure is by a reasonable meditation on that eternity to which we are tending, and in comparison with which the temporary objects, which we seek to gain by this disingenuous artifice, are utterly beneath our notice. The latter requires some little explanation, inasmuch as it may seem strange and uncharitable to impute such conduct to a dying man, or to suppose that any one will wear a mask at a moment when he is so soon to appear in the presence of Him by whom the inmost heart is known. It is certain, however, that the desire of worldly praise will sometimes linger so late, and cling so closely about the affections of man, that there are some persons who will continue to act a part till their voice and senses fail them, and even in the moment of death make up their

minds to depart with a lie on the conscience. I do not only mean those instances of dreadful and deadly self-deceit (if I may use the expression), spiritual suicide, in which men have denied to the last some crime of which they were undoubtedly guilty, and expressed a lively hope of salvation, which (their conscience must have told them) their falsehood rendered impossible; but I must own, when I have witnessed the triumphant expressions of confidence which have proceeded from those, of whose principles I have not been able to form an opinion by any means so favourable, I have been sometimes led to apprehend, that men have, even in death, adopted language to which their hearts were not responsive. Some instances of this conduct may, perhaps, have been occasioned by those well-meant details which we often meet with, of the edifying and triumphant deaths of eminent Christians; which, as tests and marks of a happy end, are copied even by those whom silence and prayer would become far better than exultation. Others, I apprehend, have proceeded from the popular doctrine of assurance, which has led men to suppose that, as the confidence of salvation is needful in order to be saved, so it was well and necessary to lash and encourage themselves into this absolute confidence by those outward expressions which can be proper to that confidence alone. But, be this as it may, it is

by no means the duty of our order to court popularity by encouraging any species of deception ; and, surely, by far the greater number of those who go before the judgement-seat of God, may be content to go thither in humble hope, and as trembling, but not forsaken ; instead of assuming the lofty language of an apostle on the eve of martyrdom, and hailing, in the midst of their secret alarms, those glories which, as yet, are hid from them.

But, while we are thus reckoning up the duties which a sick man has to perform, and the temptations to which he is liable, let the difficulty of the first, and the number and greatness of the latter, be an argument with us to leave as little as possible to be done in that state of weakness and alarm ; and while our limbs are whole, and our understandings clear, to set about the work of our salvation. “ Defer not,” said the son of Sirach, “ defer not until death to be justified. Humble thyself before thou be sick ; and in the time of sins, show repentance. Before judgement, examine thyself ; and in the day of visitation thou shalt find mercy.”¹

¹ Ecclesiasticus, xviii. 20, 21, 22.

SERMON VI.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

ST. LUKE, ii. 52.

Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

THE history, which has been read to you in the Gospel of to-day, is one of the few circumstances, which the holy Evangelists have preserved, concerning the humble and peaceable childhood of our Saviour. Short as it is, however, it is full of valuable instruction both to young and old. There are, indeed, few, if any, passages of Scripture, of which this may not be said; but those instructions are always the most impressive, which arise unexpectedly from the circumstances which happen to others; and which teach us not so much by doctrine, as by example. Such an one is the present history.

When Jesus was twelve years old, His parents, according to their yearly custom, went up to Jerusalem to keep the Passover. This great feast, which answers to our Easter, was solemnly observed by every Jew; and could, by the law of God, be kept in that place only which He

had chosen to put His name there. It was the same, indeed, with all the other sacrifices: even those, which, in the early times of the world, had been offered up to God on high places, were, on account of idolatry, forbidden by the Prophets; and were only now allowed in the temple of Jerusalem, where they were presented to God by the Priests and Levites, on the great altar of burnt sacrifice; or, if their number was too great, on the stone platform of the inner court of the temple.

It was, therefore, necessary for the Jews, on many occasions, such as the birth of an eldest son; a year of jubilee, or a solemn vow to God; to attend in this great temple; which was the Cathedral, and Mother Church of all their nation; and to which the synagogues, and smaller places of worship, were only Chapels of Ease.

But, besides these particular occasions, there was, every year, as I have mentioned, the solemn time of Passover or unleavened bread: when every grown person was obliged (whatever the distance might be) to attend in the temple, and renew, in the presence of God, and all their nation, this solemn Sacrament, in remembrance of their great delivery from the house of bondage, and from the destroying Angel of God: who, while he slew the children of the Egyptians, *passed over* the houses of the Israel-

ites, without harming them or theirs. On this day, then, the whole multitude, to the number sometimes of 200,000 souls, were collected together in the courts and neighbourhood of the temple; divided into families or small societies, each of whom killed on the occasion a goat or a lamb. After solemn prayer, the blood of these creatures was offered up; and burnt before the temple, by the High Priest, attended by all the Levites, in white garments, with great pomp, and with the sound of trumpets.

The multitude then withdrew from the temple; each family or society carrying with them their lamb, which they eat in private, with bitter herbs and unleavened bread; as is described in the 12th chapter of Exodus, and in the account which the Evangelists have given of the Last Supper of our Lord.

To this feast, then, without regarding the long journey (70 miles) between Nazareth and Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary, and the child Jesus, came.

Our Saviour was then too young to be obliged to attend; but it is likely that, being poor, they had nobody with whom they could safely leave him; and it is still more likely, that the Son of God, young as He was, already placed His chief joy in Mount Zion; that He was already glad (like his forefather David) when they said, "Let us go to the house of the

Lord :” and was anxious, already, to be engaged in His Heavenly Father’s business.

I need not repeat to you, what happened there ; Joseph’s and His mother’s sorrow on losing Him ; their anxious search ; or how they found Him, in the temple, — a child disputing with doctors and grey-bearded men : and astonishing all with His wisdom and answers. I need not repeat how He asked His parents why they sought him, since they might have been assured, that He was well employed ? How He went down to Nazareth ; and, far from being vain of the praise bestowed on Him by the Doctors of the Law, was subject and dutiful to His poor earthly parents ; or how (which concludes the account of His childhood) He grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. These are points which require no explanation ; and I shall pass on, immediately, to set before you the moral use and improvement which a Christian ought to make of these facts in the history of his Redeemer.

When we behold the frequent sorrows to which the Blessed Virgin was subject, we may be moved to wonder and apprehension, by observing the severe discipline, the frequent trials of faith and patience, to which God is accustomed to expose his greatest Saints, and those whom He loves most dearly.

When Mary was told by an angel that she

was highly favoured, and blessed among women, in giving birth to the Saviour of the world, she little thought, perhaps, how hardly she was to purchase this honour ; or how bitter sorrows (as old Simeon prophesied in the temple) were, like a sword, to pierce her heart. She little thought, that, instead of beholding the triumphs and sharing the glory of the Divine and excellent Saviour, she was to watch His agony, and to stand weeping and childless at the foot of His cross. And even now, in His very childhood, this good son, — who was her's only, who had only her on earth, and who was her happiness and honour ; whose every word and action she pondered in her heart, — how severe a grief did He cost her ! How would she mourn the danger of such tender years in the midst of so great a multitude ! How would she repent her own carelessness in losing Him : and, above all, by this negligence of hers, the Hope of Israel and of the World was thrown away ! Three days she sought Him sorrowing : and who are we that we should murmur ? When the Virgin Mary sorrowed, who are we that we should escape ?

Nay rather, (and this, my friends, is a fear which often occurs to my mind,) how much cause have the rich, and prosperous, and healthy, and all those who are unacquainted with grief ; how much cause have they to tremble, lest this

prosperity should make them forget God; how much cause have they to pray for His grace, to which nothing is impossible; and which alone can give them hopes of entering into the Kingdom of Heaven.

There is, however, a spiritual affliction, nearly resembling that of the Blessed Virgin, to which rich and poor are alike often exposed. She had lost her Saviour; and who is there amongst us, who has not sometimes felt an emptiness of heart, a want of the grace and comforts of religion, and a feeling, as if God had withdrawn Himself from our souls? There is no greater fear than this, that our sins have provoked His Spirit, and that His face is hid from us for ever; and this fear, or something like it, will attack even the best of men, when they feel their conscience (as it sometimes will be) unusually dead; their affections unusually cold or indifferent; and their prayers unusually feeble. On the bed of sickness, when the body and mind are alike weak, this fear is, more than ever, common: but wherever it exists, the sufferer ought to remember the conclusion of the Blessed Virgin's story, that the Christ, whom she had lost, was found by her in the temple. No help can be had from the world; no comfort from kinsfolk or acquaintance: but the wounded conscience will find a sure relief in the Church of God, and in the services of religion. Those,

who, notwithstanding the gloomy thoughts which I have mentioned, will persevere in prayer ;— who will seek the Lord diligently in His Scriptures, His temple, and His Sacraments ;—will not be left without a comforter : they may be allowed to seek Him sorrowing ; but, let them persevere, and the grace of God Himself will speak to their heart, as with the voice of His beloved Son, “ I will never leave thee, or forsake thee.” “ Blessed are they that mourn ; for they shall be comforted !” “ Blessed are they, that hunger and thirst after righteousness ; for they shall be filled.”¹

There is another caution, too, which naturally rises from this Gospel, and which, to minds of this sort, may be very necessary. They are apt to think it a matter of indifference, where or how they seek for religious comfort or instruction ; and too many artful advisers are always to be met with, who attempt to ensnare them from the Church, as established by law, and handed down from the Apostles themselves ; they attempt, I say, to ensnare them from the Church into the chapels and meeting-houses of other religions.

But Christ, let every believer consider, Christ was not found in the high places, or other irregular houses of worship. Great as He was, and superior to all temples made with hands,

¹ St. Matthew, v. 4. 6.

He was not above respecting the Scribes who sat in Moses's seat; or observing all lawful commands and ceremonies,—even those which, not God only, but even the government and rulers of His country had established. He, though he brought a more glorious religion to light, was not neglectful of the religion of His country; and shall we desert ours for new inventions? Shall we seek Christ among those who (by whatever name they call themselves,) have committed the great sin of causeless separation from the congregation of their fellow Christians; who have forsaken His Sacraments, and His lawful ministers; and who too often preach, I fear, doctrines ruinous to the truth, or to that godliness which is in Christ? Be warned in time, my friends, when you are tempted, in future, to forsake this holy place, and such plain and honest counsel as I can give, for new altars and new teachers. When you are told “that there can be no harm in hearing God's word, wherever and by whomsoever preached;” be warned in time, that such are the usual acts of those false teachers described by St. Paul, “which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins¹ :” teachers who, as Saint Peter tells us, “are presumptuous, self-willed, not ashamed to speak evil of dignities.”² And be warned, I say again, that a curse is denounced against those who,

¹ 2 Timothy, iii. 6.

² 2 Peter, ii. 10.

having itching ears, after their own lusts, shall keep to themselves teachers, as St. Jude assures us, and who are to perish in the gainsaying of Corah. As long as the Scriptures are here read and preached, and as long as the Sacraments are here administered, this is the gate of the Lord ; the righteous shall enter into it.

The last, and most important lesson to be drawn from this Gospel is the advantage of early piety. “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” That we ought to train up a child in the way in which we would have him to go, is a truth so generally known, that it has passed into a proverb ; and as far as the business of this world is concerned, it is a rule generally attended to. We hire out our sons to trades, as soon as they are fit for them ; we are anxious that, as early as possible, they should have habits of industry, and know how to earn their living ; but we are much more careless for the inheritance which endureth for ever, — the knowledge of God which is to procure for them the favour of God and man. They are but children, it will be said ; but what was Jesus, when at the age of twelve years, His lips were learned in the Scripture, and His delight was in the house of God ? Believe me, my young friends, for to you I now address myself, that same Christ, who took young children in His arms and blessed them ; who said, that, of

such as these the Kingdom of Heaven was full, He is not inattentive to all that you say or think; but every good and every evil word which you utter is open before His eyes, and noticed in His book. Imitate Him, then, and grow like Him in favour with God and man.

And let children, and grown men, and men of every age, be warned, that, in the work of amendment of life, they have no time to lose. It is not the work of a day, to imitate the holiness of Christ, but may well take up all our thoughts, our pains, and our lives. And, short as this life must always be, — even in the midst of it, we are in death. When we have thought, that we had many years before us, that we might take our ease, eat, drink, and be merry, how dismal is the surprise to the careless soul, if God should, that night, require it of our hands? And what reason have we for thinking, even if God should spare us to old age, that we should have more power to repent than now? Is it easier to pull up a tree when young; or when its root is deep, and its timber strong? How many wretched people do we see, who have put off, from time to time, the care of their souls; who are now grown old in sin; who have waked, indeed, to their danger; but only to know, that their day of grace is over, — to gaze a little while with terror on the flames of hell which await them, and then to sink for ever. Be warned in

time, ye that live carelessly : and flee for your lives, while your safety is yet possible ; and repent you, while the power of the Lord is present to heal and to forgive.

And lastly, learn, that, if you would resemble Christ in early piety, you must imitate Him in the means which He took, of acquiring grace and knowledge : you must, like Him, be obedient to your parents ; like Him, be diligent in reading or learning the Scriptures : and, like Him, place your delight in the temple of the Lord.

These are the means of grace and power : this is the armour of God ; which will enable us in youth to lay a good foundation of faith and conscience ; which will make us dear, alike to God and to man : and will carry us through the dangers of youth, of manhood, and of old age, to the happy home where we shall rest from our labours.

SERMON VII.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

ST. JOHN, xv. 5.

Without Me ye can do nothing.

THESE words were addressed by our Lord to His Apostles as a reason for their patient continuance in His Church, and in the profession of a faith in Him, which He had represented under the similitude of a vine and its branches. “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing.” As if He had said, “Without that continual grace and spiritual assistance of the Holy Ghost, which I shall give to my faithful disciples, (as constantly, though as invisibly, as the tree yields sap to the nourishment of the branch which grows on it,) ye cannot bring forth the fruits of holiness and everlasting life; ye cannot make yourselves good; ye cannot convert, and change yourselves;

ye cannot, by your own strength, continue in a course of faith and Christian obedience.”

It is the truth and certainty of this declaration which it will be my business in the present sermon to establish; and this may be best effected, by explaining, first, the necessity which we are under of receiving some such help from God, in order to enable us to serve and please Him : secondly, by bringing forward the testimony of many parts of Scripture to the reality of this gracious and needful assistance : and, thirdly, [which may take away those objections which the pride and wisdom of the world have urged against the doctrine in question ;] to explain the manner in which, from our own experience and from the word of God, we may conceive such assistance to influence our hearts and understanding.

And, first, the necessity of such a help as this may be plainly perceived by all who consider the weakness and corruption of man's nature, the power of evil habits, the inconstancy of human resolution, and the malice and activity of those spiritual enemies who tempt us to sin and ruin. That the nature of man is in itself inclined to evil, is a truth, which the wisest and best of the heathen themselves have had sufficient light to acknowledge and deplore ; and many of them had still retained some faint memory of that unhappy transgression of our

earliest parents ; by which sin entered into the world, and death by sin ; and whence corruption and weakness are derived to the whole race and posterity of Adam ; inasmuch as whatsoever is born of the flesh is flesh, and liable to corruption.

Nor, indeed, can we fail to perceive, by our own observation of what passes within us, that we are at all times more ready to sin than to do good ; that, in the common language of the world, the notions of self-denial and pain are always joined to those of active goodness ; and that while we talk of conquering sin, we confess, by that very expression, that we are naturally sinful. Accordingly, when Scripture speaks of our natural state, and of the manner in which Christ has redeemed us from it, it represents our condition not only as miserable but helpless. “ When we were yet without strength,” saith St. Paul, “ in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”¹ When mankind were utterly unable to recover themselves from that state of misery and sin, “ in the fulness of time ”²— at the time, that is, which God saw to be most convenient — He sent His Son into the world to die for sinners ; and, by that Spirit which raised Him from the dead, to enable us to mortify our lusts, and to rise to newness of life. So that our natural weakness is of itself sufficient to render this grace of the Most High peculiarly necessary to every man.

¹ Romans, v. 6.

² Galatians, iv. 4.

But this is not the whole ; since, besides this natural weakness, there is a weakness of our own acquiring, which, without God's help, must render our attempts to please Him, as useless as to run a race in chains. We have all of us, by indulging our evil nature, formed habits of sin ; we are accustomed to do evil ; and custom, by the language of the world itself, is allowed to be a second nature, which must make repentance as impossible, as for the blackamoor to change his skin, or the leopard to wash away his spots.

And, thirdly, we must add, to these impediments, the inconstancy and fickleness of man's resolution. Suppose that, upon hearing the terrible threatenings of God's word against sin, a sinner should, of himself, entertain a purpose to break off his wicked courses, yet do we not perceive, by our own sad experience, how soon such good resolutions pass away, when the feelings which produced them are gone by ? When we are not tempted, we are bold and hopeful : but when dangers arise, or when the objects of our desire are present, how soon do our good purposes become like the morning cloud, and as the early dew which passeth away ! So we needs must confess with the prophet Jeremiah, " Oh, Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself ; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps ! "

And, besides this weakness of our nature, this strength of habit and inconstancy of resolution, we have a powerful enemy in the Devil ; who is very malicious and active to promote our ruin by keeping us still in this slavery. We are not only weak within, but strongly assaulted outwardly ; we wrestle not only with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, and spiritual wickednesses. The powers of hell are joined for our destruction ; and we have, therefore, need of an extraordinary strength and assistance to enable us to contend with such powerful adversaries. And our comfort is that God offers His grace to us ; and that, as God Himself made answer to Paul, He is sufficient for all our wants and dangers. Greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world : the Spirit of God is infinitely stronger than even he who goeth about like “a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”¹

For it is to this grace and help of God, that the Scripture constantly ascribes our regeneration and sanctification, and perseverance in holiness. We are said to be born again of the Spirit ; to be sanctified by the renewing of the Holy Ghost ; to be led by the Spirit of God, through the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the flesh ; to do all things through Christ strengthening us ; and to be kept, by the power of God, through

¹ 1 St. Peter, v. 8.

faith, unto salvation. All which most plainly expresses that help of Christ, whereby we become good ; and are enabled to do any thing that is good ; and are preserved in a good course. As the Scripture everywhere attributes sin to our own corrupt hearts, and to the malice and instigation of the Devil ; so does it constantly ascribe all the good which we do to the help of God's Holy Spirit : or, which is the same thing, to the grace of Christ. For the Spirit of God is called the Spirit of Christ ; and often Christ Himself. " If any man," saith St. Paul, " have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His ; and if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin." ¹ It is proved, then, both from reason, and from Scripture ; that, except by God's grace, we can bring forth no fruit of holiness ; and that " without Christ we can do nothing."

And, if we are asked, in the third place, after what manner the Spirit of God and of His Christ produces this blessed effect on our souls ; — we reply, that it is by diverting our attention to such outward objects, or means of knowledge, as may enable us to see the things which belong to our peace, and to be sensible of our real interests ; and by recalling to our memory such of our own good resolutions, or such awakening passages of Scripture, as may best keep us in those good

¹ Romans, viii. 9, 10.

purposes which the same Holy Spirit has, at first, assisted us to form. Accordingly, the grace of the Holy Ghost is called in Scripture a light whereby we are enabled to see the things which belong to our peace, and the dangers which we ought to avoid : and which grace, without of itself giving us any knowledge, is yet the only means whereby we are enabled to learn for ourselves, or to bear in mind what we have already learned in the written word of God. It is thus a guide, a comforter, a supporter, and a remembrancer ; and without it we may vainly read the Scripture ; vainly attend on public worship ; our hearts will be empty of the power of godliness, and the form will profit us nothing.

But, on the other hand, this grace and assistance does not exclude, but plainly supposes, the concurrence of our own endeavours. It strengthens us, and enables us to work ; but it does not work for us while we continue idle. So that, though we are not sufficient of ourselves for any thing that is good, yet, being promised this merciful support, we both may, and must endeavour to work together with God ; lest, by our own want of diligence, we should receive His grace in vain. “ Work out your own salvation ; ” are the words of St. Paul, “ for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His own good pleasure.”

I shall conclude my discourse on this subject

with a few practical observations on those truths whereof I have endeavoured to convince you.

First, it is plain that, as this gift of grace proceeds from God for Christ's sake, and is, therefore, called the grace of Christ; so it is plain that a sincere faith in Christ, whereby we abide in Him and He in us, is the means by which we derive it to our souls. I do not mean that the converting and sanctifying grace of God may not be given to others besides Christians; were it otherwise, no man could become a Christian, or be converted at all, since it is God who calleth us, as well as God who keeps us in our calling; but this I mean, that, unless we, who are thus called, abide by faith in Christ's mystical body, we can, as that blessed Redeemer Himself assures us, "do nothing."

But, secondly, this faith must be expressed, and shown forth by those means which God Himself appoints,—by prayer, by the use of the Sacraments, and by that, which is in itself, in God's eyes, a continual and most availing prayer, a hearty and faithful endeavour after holiness. God gives no favours except to those who seek them earnestly; we must ask, before it is given to us; we must knock, before it will be opened; we must strive to enter in at the narrow gate, or we shall never be enabled to enter that Paradise which is beyond it. And to these exertions we are the more encouraged by our Father's assur-

ance, that, if made in the manner which He directs, they shall not be made in vain ; that His grace is indeed sufficient for us ; and that, however weak and powerless our own nature may be, we are enabled to do all things through Christ that strengtheth us.

Thirdly, let us take heed, that we resist not the Spirit of God, and receive His grace in vain. And this we do, if at any time, when, God having clearly shown us our duty, we shrink from its performance ;—when we wilfully shut our eyes to the light which His Holy Spirit has kindled in our souls, and disregard those blessed whispers, whereby He reminds us, that such or such conduct we ought to pursue : and that such or such actions are contrary to the commandments of Scripture ;—“ My Spirit,” said God, “ shall not always strive with man¹,”—and they, who quench these blessed motions in their hearts, may reasonably fear, that the guidance, which they thus despise, will be for ever taken away ; and that they will be abandoned to their natural blindness and wickedness ;—a habitation of devils, and a cage of all unclean and hateful thoughts.

Lastly, we should thankfully acknowledge and ascribe all the good which we do, [little, as God knows, that is, even in the best of us,] and all that is righteous within us, to Him alone, from

¹ Genesis, vi. 3.

whose free mercy we thus receive the power of rendering Him, what He is graciously pleased to consider,—acceptable service : and we should learn to say with St. Paul, “not I, but the grace of God which is with me¹ ;”—and with David, “not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thine own name be glory, for thy loving kindness, and thy truth’s sake.”²

And may He, by whom we are called and sanctified, having already begun a good work in our souls, conduct the same to a blessed conclusion ; and, finally, lead us to that eternal crown of glory, which His mercies, not our merits, shall bestow, through His blessed Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

² Psalm, cxv. 1.

SERMON VIII.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

ROMANS, xii. 19, 20, 21.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

IN these verses, which form a portion of the Epistle which has been read to you this morning from the altar, St. Paul explains in few words the conduct which a Christian should pursue towards his enemies. For, though the life which a Christian ought to lead is, of all others, one would imagine, the least exposed to the malice of mankind,—though it is an essential part of his duty to live, as far as is possible, peaceably with all men,—yet still, this condition of entire peace, this unoffending and unoffended life, (though much more possible than the proud or violent will imagine) is, in a great degree, unattainable.

So long as there are wicked men, there will be violence; so long as there are proud men, there will be insult; and so long as mankind are tempted to dislike those characters which differ from their own, the Christian will be often peculiarly exposed to hatred, or to injury. When thus situated, our duty, we are told, is not to avenge ourselves, but rather to give place to the wrath of others; not to endeavour to ruin our enemy; but, if he hunger, to feed him; if he thirst, to give him drink; we are, lastly, not to yield to the temptations to violence or malice, temptations which his wicked conduct throws in our way; we are not to meet him with his own weapons, and render him evil for evil; but we are to overcome evil by good.

“What?” will be the reply, “when our cheek yet burns with the blow, and our memory is smarting with the sense of injury; when our neighbour has transgressed all the laws of God and man towards us, are we to shew him that moderation and mercy which we do not receive? Are our hands to be tied by religion, while his are at full liberty? And are we to give place to wrath, to yield at once the point, and encourage him to new attacks by the dastardly manner in which we endure his present violence? What security would there be then remaining, for our property or our persons; and to what end are we to be mocked by these gifts of strength, or courage,

or power, which we are forbidden, even in self-defence, to employ?"

In answer to these objections, we may remark, first, that to repel or resist an injury is not forbidden. Self-defence is a very different thing from revenge. I may, by any means in my power, prevent a man from stabbing me; though it would be wicked and malicious if, after receiving the stab, I followed him to return it. The latter action cannot plead necessity; I do myself no good, and obtain no cure for my own wound, except that wicked pleasure which arises from, what is called by wicked men, the sweetness of revenge. The former has self-preservation for its object; is not only necessary, but even laudable; and is not,—however some texts may seem to bear that interpretation,—is not forbidden in Scripture. Those strong expressions of not resisting evil, of turning one cheek when the other is smitten, are either merely figurative, and mean no more than an eagerness to avoid dispute, and to submit even, for the sake of peace, to trifling injuries; or else are confined exclusively to the disciples of Christ during his lifetime, and to those seventy in particular, whom he sent before His face as sheep among wolves, without shoes or scrip or sword. For that this restriction was confined to this single occasion, we may learn from His words, when He was about to leave the world: it would have

been vain and useless to allow them to wear a sword, which they were forbidden to draw ; or a purse, which it was unlawful to defend : and we may be sure, that, when he allowed them these, He allowed them also, by every honest means, to guard themselves and all which they possessed.

Neither public war, therefore, nor private self-defence, are condemned : but both the one and the other become criminal, when pursued beyond the limits of self-preservation ; and a Christian will consider them both, as snares and temptations, which it is expedient to avoid, even by surrendering, in a small degree, his just and lawful claims.

Revenge, however, or malice, or the feeling which we express by the name of spite, is always positively forbidden : and, if any thing were necessary to make so harmful a quality more conspicuously hateful, it would be the argument which the apostle subjoins, that God has reserved to Himself the punishment of all offences ; that He is sole judge and monarch of the universe ; and that all the violence which we commit, and all the injuries which we receive, will be, sooner or later, punished or redressed by Him. “ Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.” And shall we dare to snatch the thunderbolt from His hand ; or the sceptre from those rulers of the world, whom He hath made

His deputies? When an appeal to law is absolutely necessary for the preservation of society, or for the maintenance of private property, Heaven forbid I should condemn it: the powers that be are the ordinances of God; and public wars are, on the same ground, justifiable. But any other means of doing justice, as it is called, to ourselves, is an implied refusal to commit the cause to God, and to His righteous judgement seat.

We think that we are injured—let us be patient; we have God for our avenger; and he, who has committed the injury, be sure is the object of God's displeasure, and must await that dreadful day when He will render to every man according to his works. And is not this man a much greater object of pity, than you! The little injury—which he has inflicted on you,—is it equal, is it to be at all compared to the dreadful consequences which it will bring on himself? Are you not satisfied with the vengeance which God will pronounce? or do you wish, in impotent malice, to wreak your anger on him in this world, and add some little to the sorrows which must hereafter be his portion? If so, go, satisfy your hatred: but be sure, that such atrocious malice can never be endured by a just and merciful Creator; and that, when He dooms the aggressor to eternal torment, the avenger must accompany him.

“ But the crime, of which you complain, the injuries which you have received, are not so heinous, as to merit so dreadful a sentence ; you only want to wreak your anger on him in this world ; and neither wish nor expect that he should receive any punishment in the world to come.” Indeed !—has God forgiven him, and cannot you ? Are your eyes so pure and holy that they cannot endure even those sins which are beneath the anger of the Almighty ? Woe to man if he receive the same measure from God as he has given to his neighbour—woe, unutterable woe to the revengeful person, if God tries him by his own balance, and accounts with him for every little debt with the same severity which he has shewn to his fellow servant ! “ But your passions,” you will answer, “ are not in your own power ; you cannot help being angry.” Before you say, *you cannot*, be very sure that you have really made the experiment ; but, however, at least restrain your fury ; at least “ be angry and sin not : let not the sun go down upon your wrath.”¹ Imitate in this those little children who are called in Scripture the heirs of the kingdom of Heaven. How uncommon is a spiteful or malicious child ; and what an odious prodigy do all men esteem it. Children may be quick to anger ; but they are also forgiving of

¹ Ephesians, iv. 26.

injury : and the storms, which arise in their little minds, are the lightning of a moment, and pass away. But man, wiser and greater as he esteems himself than they, man smothers his anger ; he hides it as a snake in his bosom ; and warms and cherishes it there ; content to be himself undone, so he may contrive to sting his enemy. Oh, by all your hope of comfort here, or of happiness hereafter, reject from your bosom this plague, which will daily gather those stings and goads ; which from small beginnings, lead the way to more hideous disorders ; and, from a hasty word or look, lay the dark foundation of a mischief which destroys, ere long, the comfort of neighbourhoods, the peace of families, and the eternal happiness of souls.

But, secondly, it is not only our duty to do our enemies no harm, we must go still farther ; and, if they need our assistance, we must be ready to do them good. “ If thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink.”

And, strange as it may seem, this is the wisest as well as the most Christian course which we can pursue. In the first place, by these acts of kindness, we make our own task easier of combating our resentment ; and extinguishing every spark of malice in our hearts. If we accustom ourselves to view our enemies as objects of pity ; if we practise kindness to them ; and even force

our inclinations to do them service, we shall find, ere long, the glow of returning good will ; and shall feel all those malignant passions fading, which were the curse and torment of the heart which nourished them.

Again, in point of safety, this is the best and surest course. If we are apprehensive of future injuries from our enemy, what method can be devised so likely to change his heart, and indispose him to mischief, as this lovely return of good for evil, this display of our real character, and these disinterested good deeds, which gently reprove his enmity, and teach him to wish for our esteem ?

But, lastly, if it fail to conciliate him, if it do not make him our friend, there is ONE, at least, a strong and mighty friend, a powerful and formidable defender ; whose assistance and support we gain. God is on the side of the merciful ; God is our shield and buckler : of whom shall we be afraid ? There is no stronger weapon than this ; though we heaped coals of fire on his head ; though we afflicted him with the severest misery ; and exterminated with fire and sword himself, his wife, his little ones, all who might lament or revenge him ; yet should not we be so secure, as when by mercy and forgiveness we interest Omnipotence on our side ; and obtain that protection and favour, to which not only

the powers of nature, but the violence of malice is subject,—which stilleth the noise of the waves, and the madness of the people.

It is true, besides, that there is nothing to a proud and irritable temper so painful, as to owe an obligation to an enemy ; and this is another meaning, which may be affixed to the expression “ coals of fire.” When your food and drink are thus distributed to one who has injured you ; it is no pleasant meal, no welcome beverage which he swallows ; every act of kindness, every cup of cold water which he receives from you, strikes daggers to his heart ; and afflicts him with those torments of remorse, those coals of fire, which are hardly to be exceeded by any of the earthly judgements of God. And, though to give pain should certainly be no part of our motive for an outward act of kindness, which would be a cruelty most refined, and a hypocrisy most detestable, yet, though we do not rejoice at the pain, which he feels, we may hope, at least, that this pain will be salutary ; and that, if we are unable by our kindness to conciliate his love, we may, at least, by the remorse and shame and confusion, which he must feel, we may, at least, oblige him to alter his conduct. And this is what may be called “ overcoming evil by good,” which is the last part of the apostle’s direction. For we must consider, that, as all the injuries and acts of violence, which we receive, are

temptations and means employed by the Devil to warp our souls from righteousness, and to make us everlastingly miserable, if we yield to those temptations, if we encourage the evil passions of our hearts, and instead of referring vengeance to God, become judges and executioners in our own cause, we may perhaps, if we succeed, occasion some slight worldly damage to the man whom we hate ; but we are serving, in the meanwhile, the interests, and forwarding the horrible projects of the great Enemy of ourselves and of all mankind, that Evil spirit in whose hands our enemies are only tools, and who rejoices alike in their destruction and in our own. How we may conceive him exulting over the wreck which he has occasioned ; when, by one single act of violence, two souls are lost, the man who committed the injury and he who revenged it ! And is it not madness, as well as wickedness, thus to yield ourselves to certain destruction, for the bare chance of making our neighbour a little uncomfortable ? Who, in the hope of scorching his adversary, would set fire to himself or his household ? And is not their folly equal, who, to gratify the glow of a revengeful spirit, throw away the privileges of a Christian ; and, by refusing to forgive those who trespass against them, lose all reasonable hope of having their own trespasses forgiven ?

For, we must not deceive ourselves, unless we

from our heart, forgive other men their trespasses, our Heavenly Father will never forgive us ours. Every crime of which we are guilty, every failing in thought or word or deed, is treasured in the mind of God against the day of wrath; and of that day who may abide the coming? “Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison:—Verily, I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.”¹

Every prayer which the resentful man offers, is an insult to his Maker; nor dare we offer our gifts on the altar, before we are reconciled with our brother. How, indeed, can we otherwise approach the table of the merciful Jesus, or hope for favour and acceptance at His hands, or from His precious blood; whose errand to the world was peace and good will; who “when He was reviled, reviled not again: when He suffered, he threatened not²:” whose whole life was spent in acts of mercy to those who hated Him: whose last words were a prayer for His murderers: and who, in the agonies of a bitter death, unpitied, afflicted, and reviled, could think of their mise-

¹ St. Matt. v. 25, 26.

² 1 St. Peter, ii. 23.

ries more than of His own, and say, “ Father, forgive them ? ”

That we may, at humble distance, imitate His blessed disposition ; that we may, by His grace, forgive and be forgiven — may He grant, who liveth and reigneth for ever with the Father and the Holy Ghost.

SERMON IX.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

ST. MATTHEW, viii. 34.

And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus : and when they saw Him, they besought Him that He would depart out of their coasts.

You have heard, in the Gospel for this morning's service, the occasion on which this request was made. It was the language of the Gergesenes to Christ, who had entered their land with the glad tidings of salvation ; who came to heal their distresses, to relieve their sorrows, and to take upon Himself their infirmities. He came, in His own power, and in the power of His Father, to conquer those evil spirits, whom God, to make the triumph of His Son more glorious, had allowed at that time to rage, with more than common violence, against the minds and bodies of men.

Nor was it only their outward infirmities which He was to alleviate ; He came to bear their trans-

gressions, as well as their sicknesses ;—to heal their hearts, as well as their afflicted and miserable bodies. Such was the errand of our Lord ; but those whom He came to help,—how did they receive Him ? They, with one consent, entreated Him to depart from their coasts. They shewed Him some outward respect, it is true ; they could not deny a power, of which He had that moment given a proof so manifest ; but this admiration of theirs, this outward reverence, is all which the Son of God can obtain. They entreat, not that He would continue there to complete the work which He had so nobly begun ; they do not exult in His presence, and rejoice in the glad shining of the day-star of Almighty Power and Mercy : the appearance of the Son of God was as visible to them, as His vision was to Daniel on the banks of Hiddekel ; and the beams of Mercy itself were too dazzling for their fleshly eyes. They besought Him to depart out of their coasts.

I am desirous of explaining to you the reason of this strange request, — the strangest, one would think, that a rational being could conceive, or utter. Which of you, let me ask, would act in this manner ? If a messenger from Heaven should arrive in your house, should heal your family of their sickness, and inform you of the means of becoming happy to all eternity, would not you cling with eagerness to so gracious a guide ; and like Jacob, suffer Him not to depart,

before you had obtained a blessing? Yet are these misguided Gergesenes uneasy at the presence of Christ, and entreat His departure as the greatest and only favour which they could ask! Did they doubt, that He was really sent from God; or was the name of JESUS unknown to them? But His fame had spread through all the neighbouring country:—in Nazareth, in Capernaum, in Jerusalem, were thousands to be met with, who had heard His doctrine, and been healed by Him of their infirmities; and in the cottage of the fisherman, and in the palace of the tetrarch, the Prophet of Galilee was known, and wondered at.

But it was not blind and distant report, it was not the accounts of other men, or other cities, which were to confirm their faith; the mariners were there, the companions of our Saviour's voyage, who could relate that they had seen, some hours before, the stormy wind and tempest yield obedience to His voice, and the wave, which hung threatening over their vessel, sink back at His bidding, on the bosom of the sea. Nay, more than all, their own townsmen, who had seen the cure of the possessed of devils, and the wonderful calamity inflicted on the herd of swine,—the person too, whom He had delivered from the torture of the evil spirits, him whom they so long had witnessed the inhabitant of ruinous sepulchres, a wretched and untameable madman,—this man

also they saw, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind.

Nor, indeed, do the men of Gadara (as their city was sometimes called)—nor do they appear to have entertained any doubt, that JESUS was the SON OF GOD, or that He had really the power and the will to heal their diseases, and Himself to bear their infirmities. Of this, as I have already mentioned, they had proof before their eyes; and they shew their conviction, by the humble respect which they pay Him, and by their earnest entreaties to induce Him to depart. Why, then, so strange a request? Why so unreasonable an impatience to rid themselves of a visitor who had the power, as well as the will, to serve and deliver them?

Was it humility, or consciousness of guilt, that induced it, as being afraid of Christ, or feeling themselves unworthy to receive Him into their city? They must have known, for it was Christ's constant and public declaration, that it was His business and errand to call sinners to repentance. The account given in Scripture, and what little knowledge of these people is obtained from other books, may, perhaps, enable us to assign a reason. It was this very repentance, of which they were afraid.

The inhabitants of the remoter parts of Galilee had, from a very early period of the Jewish history, been remarkable for the badness of their

character, for the impurity of their conduct, and for their frequent disregard of all those laws which Almighty wisdom had thought fit to impose on the children of Israel. They were negligent in their attendance on the Temple of Jerusalem ; and pleaded, perhaps, as an excuse, their distant situation, and the difficulties which opposed their journey. The same reason, by dividing them from the other Jews, had tempted them to mix with the heathen tribes who surrounded their city ; to take the heathen women in marriage ; and to comply with many of those foul and idolatrous customs, which the law of God so repeatedly prohibits. The heathen tribes, too, who had been planted there by the armies of Assyria, —though they had paid a formal reverence to the renowned and mighty God of Israel, were tainted still with all their ancient vices, and gave their faith to most of their ancient superstitions. “The way of the sea beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations,” is described in Isaiah as “a people that walked in darkness¹ :” and in the present history we have an example, in the circumstance of their feeding large herds of swine, we have an example, I say, from this very circumstance, how much they disregarded the law of Moses ; and set, as it were, at open defiance the command which God had given to their fathers.

¹ Isaiah, ix. 1, 2.

I need not tell you, that, for some wise reason doubtless, this animal was forbidden to the Jewish nation. It is one of those many commands, which ended at the death of Christ, and which concerned the Jewish people only; but still, till Christ was really offered up, till the burden of the law was, by His death, removed,—to feed an animal thus declared unclean was, in Israel, a daring contempt of the revealed will of the Almighty; and was justly punished by our Lord, in the destruction of such unlawful property.

This, as I apprehend, was the principal reason which induced Him to afflict the swine with this strange and unusual disorder; and to suffer the evil spirits, disappointed in their enmity to man, to waste their fury in the destruction of other animals. There was, indeed, another reason. The conversation of our Lord with the devils, their answer and request, the permission granted them, and the immediate transfer of the madness from the human sufferer to the herd, were so many proofs that the disease was really inflicted by evil spirits; and that these powerful and malicious beings were subject to the absolute command of their great enemy and conqueror. It proved too, beyond the smallest possibility of denial, that other causes, besides a weakness of nerves, or strength of fancy, gave efficacy to the words of our Lord; and enabled Him to perform

such wonderful and unexampled cures. Here, as well as in the miracle of the withered fig-tree, no man could pretend, that fancy had the smallest influence ; no faith on one side, or art on the other, could forward a miracle, which had brutes, or plants, for its subject ; and an event so immediately following the command we can never suppose to be produced by the mere coincidence of accident.

The men of Gadara had, then, ample reason to humble themselves, in the presence of so powerful a stranger as Jesus ;—to exult in the arrival of so merciful a physician, by whom all their infirmities both might, and would, be relieved. Instead of thus rejoicing, they assembled round Him, indeed ; but it was only to entreat Him to depart. They grudged their swine too much, to rejoice in the recovery of their unfortunate townsman ; and had rather continue in their infirmities, than run the risk of losing their unlawful wealth. Many of those, who were thus anxious with our Lord to leave them, were labouring, no doubt, under diseases, which He only could relieve,—misfortunes, which He only could comfort. And to all, He bore the joyful tidings of life and immortality ; to all, He was the great power of God to salvation, and the only gate to hope in this life and to happiness in the life to come. All this they knew, or might have known ; they were sensible, perhaps, of their

own necessities ; and of the arm of God which then was present to heal them : but they would not purchase relief at the expence of their herds of swine. They knew that such herds were forbidden by the law of Moses ; they knew that they incurred thereby, sooner or later, the inevitable curse of God ; yet would not these considerations, nor the punishment itself which their breach of the law had just received, yet would not all these subdue their obstinate covetousness, or induce them to receive with gratitude or humility the great Physician of their souls.

And thus it too often happens with the hearts and consciences of men. It is not only the people of Gadara by whom Christ's merciful offers are thus declined and slighted. All of us have some favourite vice ; all of us have some unlawful habit or possession ; which our hearts are tempted to prefer to Christ. We know, for instance, since every page of Scripture bears an ample testimony, that, without repentance, no man can receive the mercies of God, through Jesus Christ. Yet is repentance a work of so much labour ; yet there are sins so dear, which we are called on to renounce ; that we cannot bear, at so high a rate, to purchase even our eternal salvation.

The more dangerous, indeed, a vicious habit is become,—the more certain the indignation of God, the stronger hold it too often acquires on

our hearts; and the offence becomes, in the strong language of our Lord Himself, as precious as a right eye or a right hand. Then it is that we feel ourselves unhappy in the consideration of any religious subject; we are miserable, when we reflect on the danger of our condition; when we know the necessity of sacrifices, which we are unwilling to make; till, at length, we close our eyes wilfully on our danger; and drive, by every means in our power, all holy thoughts from our minds. Thus, to preserve some foul indulgence, some earthly wealth or privilege, as contemptible in the balance as a herd of swine against the salvation of a city; we slight the offers of mercy; resist the Holy Spirit of the Lord; and, like these besotted Gergesenes, oblige Him to depart from us. To a man of this sort, the mention of religious truths is torment and horror; he feels the thoughts of his Redeemer as the greatest misery which he knows; and exclaims, with the evil spirits, "What have we to do with Thee? art Thou come to torment us, before the time?"

Such is the wretched state of those whose hearts are hardened in iniquity. If there be any here whose conscience is afflicted with pangs like these, let me beseech him to seize with joy the first movement of repentance, and to burst, by the help of God, the yoke of a slavery so dreadful, a slavery whose wages are death. The covetous

man, whose ill-gotten wealth is weighing down his soul to the nethermost hell; the drunkard who is wasting his health, his substance, and his soul together; the fornicator, against whom the sure judgements of God are preparing; every one—who is in the daily practice of any sin whatever, let him learn, that faith availeth not without repentance; and that repentance is shewn by ceasing to do evil, and by learning to do well. These darling sins which he is so unwilling to give up—are they really to be compared with the joys of Heaven; or really to be set in the balance against the fire which burneth for ever? And resign them he must of necessity;—willingly, or not, he must relinquish them all; and the time will come, (how soon is only known to God) when all these indulgences, which he could not bear to lose, will serve only to make his sufferings more grievous. A few days, a few hours, perhaps a few moments of pleasure,—this is the mighty price, for which we barter our souls; these are the treasures of this world, to preserve which we resist the mercies of the Lord, and conjure our Redeemer to depart from us!

May He dispose your hearts to better thoughts: and may we all so seek for our salvation by diligent prayer, and by steady resolutions of amendment, that He may return in mercy to our souls; and, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, make, as he hath promised, His abode there for ever!

SERMON X.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

ISAIAH lix. 20.

The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob.

ISAIAH, the son of Amos, has been distinguished from all the other writers of the Old Testament by the name of the Evangelical Prophet: and it is certain, that, in no part of Scripture, not even in the Psalms of David themselves, is the coming of Christ so often and so clearly foretold; and His person and character, so plainly and fully represented. It has been, therefore, the opinion of very good and learned men, that no way can be thought of—so likely to convert the Heathen to Christianity,—as to put into their hands some of the most remarkable passages of Isaiah, together with the Gospel of St. Matthew, in which the fulfilment of these striking prophecies is related; informing them, at the same time, that, between the death of Isaiah, and the birth of the Lord Jesus, was a distance of time amounting to,

at least, seven hundred years ; and leaving them to judge, whether a religion, which was confirmed by such prophecies and wonders, could have proceeded from any but God.

And it is, I suppose, on account of this remarkable connexion between the principal chapters in Isaiah, and the leading facts of our Saviour's history, that our Church has appointed the proper lessons, for all Sundays from Advent to Septuagesima, to be taken from this book ; in order that, at the time of year when we are more particularly called on to meditate, with solemn thankfulness, on Christ's coming into the world, we may be the better enabled to understand the occasion of that coming ; and to value the benefits which we receive from it ; by learning how great things had been spoken of it by holy men in ancient times ; and of what nature and description those blessings were, which, so many hundred years before, had been promised to the world through the holy Child Jesus.

Accordingly, when we read, or hear read to us, in any of the lessons for these Sundays, such passages as those in the 1st, 2nd, 5th, and 24th chapters of this prophecy, in which the Jews are described—as fallen from grace, as given over, with few exceptions, to a mad and cursed idolatry, as oppressors, bloodthirsty, and deceitful,—we should remember, that the picture here drawn of them is as faithful a picture of the

Gentiles, also ; who, no less, or even more, than the Jews, are concluded by Scripture to be under sin, and as owing all the light and knowledge of their duty, which they have since received—all the increased power to perform that duty, which has been since bestowed on them—all the gracious acceptance and favour, with which their imperfect services are received, and their repented sins, forgiven—to that glorious Saviour alone, whose coming into the world is, at this season, celebrated by the Church.

When, in the 25th, 26th, 30th, 37th, and 38th chapters, we read of the grievous judgments, which befell the mightiest nations of the world,—the kings of Egypt, and of Assyria,—we are naturally led to measure the vanity of mortal pride and power, — when compared with that kingdom of the Son of God, which is to rule all people, and endure for all ages, — and to feel and know, that there is no salvation in the arm of flesh ; nor strength in the councils of earthly wisdom.

Those chapters, which, like the 44th and 46th, set forth the vanity of idols, and the desperate folly of those, who, when they had hewn out the stock of a tree into form, fell down before the work of their hands and worshipped it, saying, “ Be thou my God, and deliver me ! ” — these chapters, I say, should teach us the great

blessedness of that Gospel-light, by which our fathers, and we ourselves, have been led, from such vanities, to know God, as He is; and to worship Him with an acceptable sacrifice. And, lastly, the more clear and express prophecies of Christ's birth, doctrine, and kingdom, which we find in the 32d, 51st, 53d, 55th, and 56th chapters, should increase and confirm our faith, by proving to us, on whom we have believed; and should convince us, how hopeless our case must be, if we neglect so great salvation; which the greatest prophets of ancient times could only behold afar off; and which, — though now laid open to the knowledge and thankfulness of babes, — the very angels of God are said to have desired to look into.

But, while the different chapters, and different passages, of Isaiah are thus rich in various instruction; and thus, in so many different ways, set forth the mercy, might, and majesty of our Redeemer; there is one particular doctrine, which may, in some degree, be learned from them all; but which is, with a more remarkable clearness, set forth in the chapter, which has been this morning read to you: the doctrine, I mean, that Christ was sent for the salvation of those, who are, by nature and by habit, undone and miserable sinners; but that these objects of His mercy are only admitted to it, on the con-

dition, that, by His grace and with His help, they forsake and turn away from their transgressions.

The first of these assertions, namely, that our Lord was sent for the salvation of those, who are, by nature and by habit, undone and miserable sinners, might be gathered from the words themselves which I have chosen as the text of my sermon. "The Redeemer," it will be remarked, is to come to "those that turn from transgression." But men must, first, have transgressed, before they can turn away from transgression; they must have sinned, before they can repent of their sins.—The same truth is, however, still more clearly declared in the former part of the chapter; where we have a plain and most dismal picture of the sins, which had made an impassable line of separation between mankind and their Maker; and of the blinded and unhappy condition, to which these sins had reduced the world. Accordingly, in the first and second verses, we find the prophet declaring that the reason, for which God had forsaken His people was, not that His own power was less than it had been of old; but that their offences had led Him to hide His face from them in displeasure. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God; and

your sins have hid His face from you.” “ For your hands,” he continues, “ are defiled with blood ; and your fingers, with iniquity ; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth ; they trust in vanity, and speak lies ; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.” “ Their feet run to evil : and they make haste to shed innocent blood ; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity ; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not ; and there is no judgement in their goings ; they have made them crooked paths ; whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.” Nor can it be said, that this hateful character of sin and shame belongs to the Jews ; or to the Jews of that particular generation only ; to whom Isaiah’s prophecy was delivered. In the first chapter of St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans, we find a description as bloody and violent, and far more disgusting and loathsome, given of the Gentile world ; who, having known God, and refused to glorify Him agreeably to His Divine nature, were given up by God “ unto vile affections,” “ to do those things which were not convenient ; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of

evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful, who knowing the judgement of God, that they, which commit such things, are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.”

It is true, that this character of the Gentiles is given by their great apostle as a statement made, not by himself, but by a Jewish accuser ; but it is not the less certain, that he admits, in the whole argument which follows, the general truth of the charges brought against them ; and that he labours throughout, not to prove the Gentiles innocent ; but to shew, from the very passage of Isaiah, which I have read to you, and from other passages of the Psalms and Prophets, that the Jews themselves were equally gone astray from goodness ; and that the Scripture hath concluded “ both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.”¹

The fact is, that, if we read the national history, or study the national manners, either of the Gentiles, or Jews, of ancient times ; or if we attend to the accounts which are given of those great and wealthy heathen nations, to whom, at the present day, the light of the gospel has not extended, I certainly do not say that we shall

¹ Rom. iii. 9.

find all men equally wicked and abominable ; or that we shall find the same man given over, at the same time, to every one of these abominable sins which have been noticed ; but this I will say, that we shall find few men, very few indeed, even tolerably free from some one or other of them ; and that experience will confirm the doctrine, that the world, in its fallen state, lieth in iniquity : and that its general conduct will answer to its general character of cruel, unjust, deceitful and unclean.

In Christian countries, indeed, (and this I say with great thankfulness to that God Incarnate who hath made His name and will and power so gloriously and brightly known to us,) in Christian countries, it is most true that vice has been driven, by the light of the Gospel, into greater obscurity ; that good examples are less uncommon and more powerful ; and that, as the grace of God has been more richly given, so its fruits have been fairer and more abundant ; and have exerted a power of opinion and decency over many, even of those whose hearts have been never thoroughly under the influence of Christian principles. Thus, mankind, in general, are wiser and better in England at this day ; than they appear to have been among the old Romans, or Jews ; or than they now are among the idolaters of India. The more detestable and outrageous vices are not so often, and not so boldly

practised with us as with them ; and it cannot be said, that the popular feeling of our country takes pleasure in those who do such things.

But, with all this improvement, and, as I have already said, I thankfully allow it to be a very great one ; with all this improvement, enough, and more than enough, of wickedness, enough of secret, enough of daring and open and fashionable, wickedness remains among us, to take from us all occasion of boasting ; and to justify, to their fullest extent, the charges brought by the Apostle against unregenerate man ; and to shew plainly, that, even in Christian countries, and among those who call themselves Christians, there are many having “a form of godliness, but denying the power ;”—many, who have “fallen away from their first love” and grace received ; many who are “still in the bond of iniquity, and gall of wickedness ;” that all are but too worldly, too carnal, too careless of God and good things ; that all have abundant reason to humble themselves before Him, as miserable sinners ; as having “erred, and strayed from His ways like lost sheep ;” as having “left undone those things, which we ought to have done, and done those things which we ought not to have done.” If, indeed, we doubt the sinfulness of mankind in general, we have only to look at our neighbours ; if we doubt our own sinfulness, we have only to examine, fairly and freely, our own

hearts and behaviour; nor can we fail to come to the same conclusion with the Prophet Isaiah, in the chapter which I am now endeavouring to explain to you, that “judgement is far from us, neither doth justice overtake us;” that we may “look for judgement, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us:” and that we can hope for no preserver, nor “intercessor, but the arm of the Lord, and His righteousness only.”

It is thus, that Scripture always leads us to a consideration of the comforts and hopes of the Gospel; by first laying before us the darkness and crimes, the fears and dangers of our natural condition; and by proving, that, in ourselves, we have neither strength, nor life, nor hope; but only in the free mercies of God, through his Son, Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.

My brethren, this is a truth of the most important and practical nature. It is a truth, which, if duly and carefully kept in mind, will shew forth its consequences in all, which we do, or say, or think; which will make us humble towards God; meek and merciful towards mankind; and will, above all, fill our hearts with unbounded love and thankfulness towards that blessed Lord, whose mercy and merits have opened to us an escape from Hell, and an entrance into Paradise. A knowledge of our own fallen condition by nature, and a recollection of the many sins and infirmities, which still cleave

to, and defile, the very best of us, will effectually keep us from indulging in vain thoughts of our own goodness, our own holiness, our own proficiency in grace and faith, and in the favour of the Almighty. The offender, who is kneeling before his Judge for pardon, has little time, has little heart or inclination, to run over the bead-roll of his own fancied merits; or to demand reward, where he feels his need of forgiveness. "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are!"—may flow very naturally from the lips of one who knows not his own condition; but, believe me, there is no one who diligently searches into his own works, his own words, his own thoughts and inmost sentiments, who will not feel himself not only inclined, but compelled to smite his breast, and to say "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

Nor will the effect produced by this knowledge and conviction be confined to our dealings with God alone. When we learn to regard the whole race of men as companions with ourselves in one great and common danger, as embarked in the same storm-beaten vessel, shipwrecked on the same troublous sea, floating on the same crazy raft with us, we shall feel for them that kind of tenderness, which, in generous and manly tempers, arises towards those who drink with us the cup of bitterness. The comparatively good or virtuous we shall love the more, as the best hopes

of the common cause; who, by their prayers, their endeavours, and their example, draw down a blessing and protection on all around them,—as the elect, for whose sake the days of misery may be shortened, which would else overwhelm all alike in one utter ruin.

Those, who are worse than ourselves, for it is impossible but we must sometimes be led to make this comparison, we shall regard with sorrow and pity, as beings still more unfortunate and plunged in still greater danger than we are; we shall fear to judge or to speak harshly of them, as “knowing that we ourselves are also in the same condemnation¹ ;” and our love will be the more kindled,—the more gratitude we feel for our own better prospects,—to extend, if possible, the same chance, the same hope, the same blessed opportunity of escape to some of those who are struggling around us in the waves of ruin.

If, again, we have any cause of complaint against any man, we shall recollect how necessary forbearance is, on the part of those who need it so greatly as we do; and we shall be the more inclined to have pity on our fellow servants, even as we desire the Lord to have pity on ourselves. And, lastly, since, though we hope to be saved, not by our own merits, but by the free mercies of Christ, we know, that the return, which He ex-

¹ St. Luke, xxiii. 40.

pects for that mercy, consists in a hearty endeavour to do His service, and a sincere submission of ourselves, our souls, and bodies, to His wise disposal, and in order to His glory ; we shall, through love for His goodness, and thankfulness for our promised deliverance, be the more anxious to please Him in will, and word, and deed,—as a friend for whom we can never do enough to shew our gratitude,—and as a master, by whom our weak but hearty endeavours will be, beyond all hope and bounds, rewarded.

It is thus, indeed, that we find the never-failing connexion between faith which worketh by love, and good works which are the fruits of love ; and that we reconcile with each other the assurances, on the one hand, of pardon for sinners ; and, on the other, of the necessity of righteousness. To the unconverted, pardon for past sins is freely offered. Christ “ came not to call the righteous but sinners¹ ;” but, the call once made and accepted, every one that nameth the name of the Lord must depart from iniquity ; for He came to call sinners to *repentance*. Let not him despair who is sensible of the evil and danger of sin ; who feels his iniquities, as a sore burthen to him ; who looks for salvation, and mourns like a dove to behold it far from him. For such, the Redeemer is come to Zion. For

¹ St. Luke, v. 32.

such, in their greatest distress, when they had no intercessor, the Lord Himself brought help with His holy arm ; and washed them with His own precious blood ; and hid their nakedness in the robes of His own everlasting righteousness. Such the Lord hath called ; such, even as many as hear me, He calleth even now, by me, to “ turn to Christ, and He will have mercy ; and to our God, and He will abundantly pardon ! ”

But let not him, whoever he may be, who continueth obstinate in wickedness ; who will not desire, or will not endeavour to forsake those sins, which, as he well knows, are most displeasing to the Almighty ; let not him fancy, that he can thus go on from folly to folly, from fault to fault, unrepenting, unheeding, unchanged ; and plead, at length, when the hour of tribulation is arrived, that the blood of Christ was shed for him. The Redeemer *is* come unto Zion ; but He is only come for the benefit of those who turn away from transgression. God forbid that we should fancy the mercies of Christ to be intended as a warrant to us to continue in wickedness ! God forbid that we should regard them as a thing to be so far trifled with ; or as a blessing to be secured on any other terms than those which He Himself has told us ! Let us rather seek His grace, and mighty help ; not only as the means of escaping from Hell, but from those sins which certainly lead us to Hell ; those sins,

by which God is grieved and man offended ; and the sinner himself rendered miserable ; those sins which we must forsake, before we enter into Heaven ; since, if we could carry them thither, even Heaven itself would cease to be a place of happiness.

SERMON XI.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

ST. MARK, xiv. 22, 23, 24.

Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, ' Take, eat : this is my body.' And He took the cup, and when he had given thanks, He gave it to them : and they all drank of it. And He said unto them, ' This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many.'

THOUGH in the various opportunities, which I have had of administering in this Church the public Sacrament of the Holy Communion, I have much reason to be satisfied with the numbers, and the seriousness of those who attended, I still have thought it good, by examining a portion of the lesson appointed for this morning's service, to confirm the faith of you all in this Christian and necessary practice ; as well as to explain to such as have been prevented from attendance by scruples or fears, or (a much worse and more common reason) by indifference to all religion—I am anxious, I say, to explain to all such, how idle their scruples are ; their indif-

ference, how criminal ; and how vainly the title of Christian is boasted by any who do not attend frequently and faithfully the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ.

I shall, then, first consider the necessity of this ordinance for the salvation of all mankind ; and prove that no man, who wilfully absents himself, can at all lay claim to any share in the merits and advantages of Christ on the Cross. I shall next state a few of the immediate advantages and blessings which are promised to the faithful communicant. Lastly, in order to explain to every man the dangers, as well as the blessings, which surround a Christian, I shall shew the nature of the curse denounced against the unworthy receiver ; and the means by which this curse may be avoided, and we may, by the grace of Jesus Christ, become worthy and blessed partakers of His Body and Blood.

To impress on your minds, then, the necessity of attendance on the Lord's table, it is proper to consider, first, that Christ's death was a sacrifice for all the sins of all mankind ; that God had, in all points, in this our passover, conformed to the passover, or sacrifice for sin among the Jews ; or, to speak more properly, that all sacrifice for sin, in shedding the blood of lambs or the like, had been, from the beginning, instituted by God, in order to set forth by signs and figures, that true Lamb, who, from the fall of Adam, was

destined to perish for the sins of mankind. These sacrifices were, in themselves, nothing. The blood of lambs and goats had no natural power to please the Almighty ; or to remove His anger against sin ; for God had no need of the flesh of bulls or the blood of goats ; if He were hungry, He would not have recourse to our aid, “ for all the beasts of the forest are His, and so are the cattle upon a thousand hills.”¹ They could then be only useful, as containing the shadow of good things to come ; as referred by faith to that all sufficient sacrifice, which they darkly and imperfectly served to represent.

In this light, however, they were useful, both to these times, and to our own ; to both times they were pledges of the covenant which God made to send His Son to redeem mankind ; and they served also to teach the world, that all men, as sinners, were deserving of the pains of death.

For the custom at a sacrifice was this. When the lamb, or other animal, was offered up, all the congregation, or priests in their name, laid their hands on its head, and confessed, that they themselves deserved, in like manner, to die for their sins ; but that they prayed to God to accept of the death of that creature, instead of theirs. Nor was this all ; for, in most ancient sacrifices, and particularly in the yearly celebration of

¹ Psalm l. 10.

the Jewish Passover, the lamb was eaten by those who stood by ; as if they became thereby partakers of all the spiritual benefits of its death.

Such were the ancient sacrifices ; but the time was now come for the real passover of the Lord ; the fulness of time, when all that debt of nature, which the sin of Adam had brought upon the world, was to be paid in the single person of Christ ; whose flesh and blood were to be offered up to God in redemption for the lives of all men. I say of all men ; for, owing to this blood, all men are restored to life ; some will, indeed, be raised again only to give a dreadful account of the opportunities of salvation which they have neglected ; but, either for hell or for Heaven, all men must be raised again. There is, indeed, a second death, which is eternal torment ; but the earthly death, the destroyer of the earthly body, is conquered and trampled under foot by Christ, who has set all men free from the fear of the grave, and opened to all, who heartily strive by His help to enter, the gates of everlasting joy.

And now, on the evening before this last and bloody passover was offered up by Christ, we behold Him, as described in the lesson of to-day, surrounded by His few remaining friends, feeling already in Himself the pangs of approaching death, and of parting with those whom He loved

most tenderly; and who only, of all the world, continued to love Him. At this moment, when His soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death, He gives His followers one last commandment, one dying legacy;—the commandment was to love one another; the legacy, His own body and blood.

For, now, to fulfil that promise, which He had made to the Jews,—a promise, in its literal sense, impossible, that He would give them His flesh to eat,—to impress also on His disciples' understanding, how really and perfectly He was offered a Sacrifice for sin; He complies, in every part, with all the Sacrificial forms; and invites all mankind, for whom this Sacrifice was made, to partake in the banquet of His flesh and Blood, thus offered up for them.

As such a banquet was, however, impossible, He substitutes the figures of bread and wine; by these He pictures His sufferings; by these he represents His broken frame, and His blood poured out; and commands us to consider, as His own Flesh and Blood, the substances which He thus employed to give to our senses some impression of His own bloody and violent death.—It is a point I would wish to be clear upon; the bread and wine remained unaltered in their substance; they were still bread and wine; but they were, by Christ's own appointment, the picture, or image of His body and blood; He

has left them with us as His representatives ; and He assures us, that, when we partake of these elements from the hand of His ministers, we are as truly, by that meal, partakers of the benefits of His death, as the Jews were preserved from the destroying angel by eating of the sacrificed lamb.

We see, then, how absolutely necessary for our soul's health is the receiving this bread and wine. For, as in the ancient Jewish Passover, none could claim the privilege of a member of the chosen nation of the Lord,—none escape, except by this ceremony, the sword of the destroying angel ; [and the soul, saith God, that eateth not, shall be cut off from his people,] so when Christ commands, that all believers should, under the figure of bread and wine, partake in like manner of His body and blood, He surely means, that this great passover should be kept, in some respects, like all which had preceded it : that, as the Jews had theirs as a bond of union among their nation, a pledge of the sure mercies of God, and a distinctive mark of the *continuance* of His people in their faith—[circumcision being the mark of their *entrance* into it,—] He surely meant, that we, in like manner, should hold—as the rallying point of our warfare, the badge and test of our profession,—this single ceremony which He has thought proper to enjoin. He certainly intended, that, as our abiding in

the religion was, at least, as necessary as our entrance into it, this outward token should be given by every believer: and that our communion should be, to our soul's health, as indispensable as our baptism.

For, unless a mark of distinction between Christians and infidels be general to all Christians, it is no distinction at all. If all Christians were not baptized, baptism would not distinguish them. If, then, the Supper be intended as such a distinction, we are no more to omit it, than we are allowed to omit the ceremony of baptism. And why, unless the Christian passover of bread and wine were to be as necessary to this people, as the Jewish passover was to them, why does Christ enjoin it? Why does He describe it to these His friends, as the mark of their profession, and the representation of His sacrifice? Believe me, my friends, Eternal Wisdom orders nothing vainly; the Word of God could never so trifle with men as to ordain them a mere useless ceremony; never would He have dignified these substances with the name of His Body and Blood, unless He had determined, through them, and, after baptism, through them only, to distinguish His people from this evil world; and to distribute to each those spiritual helps, which enable him to walk worthy of his calling, and make him entitled to every benefit purchased by his Redeemer's sufferings. Unless,

then, we can discover some other road to salvation, through Christ, than that which He Himself has pointed out ; unless we flatter ourselves, that to discover this is in our power ;—an institution so positive, a command delivered without exception, can afford no excuse for neglect. We must partake of the Sacrament, if we wish to partake the blessings of our profession ; unless we wish to incur the danger of slighting the great salvation of the Lord, and estranging ourselves from all the benefits of His Blood.

“ But,” there may be some who will ask, “ if this Christian passover be so really necessary to all, what is the condition of those who have no opportunity of communicating ? What, for instance, is the condition of children ? ” The same, I answer, as the children of the Jews, who could not be partakers of the passover ; and yet were preserved in that dreadful night of Egyptian suffering, by the faith of their parents, and by their own early dedication to God. For children we provide by baptism ; under the solemn promise, that, at a fitting age, they shall do all which this covenant lays on them. And the child thus dedicated to God, we are told by Isaiah¹, shall die, if it die, as acceptable to God, for His Son’s sake, as if it had lived through a whole hundred years of obedience.

¹ Isaiah, lxxv. 20.

Besides, where no opportunities are afforded, no service, we may be sure, is expected. Our Father is no Egyptian tyrant, who doubles our task while he diminishes our means of performing it; to make bricks without straw, is a command more worthy of Pharaoh than of the merciful and gracious God. We may feel persuaded, for in this the Scripture is express, that no man will be ever punished for offences which he could not avoid. But this indulgence to infants and to heathens, to the ignorant and the impotent, can never extend to a wilful disregard of the ordinances of God, in those who know His commandments, and are able of themselves to perform them.

And what is, after all, this terrible ceremony, the celebration of which we must enforce with so many arguments, so many entreaties, so many denunciations of the anger and judgements of God? What is this sacrifice, from which the soul of man so shrinks in horror? If some kind friend upon his death-bed, — some illustrious public benefactor, — had entreated his friends, or his countrymen, to meet occasionally in solemn celebration of his memory; who, that was really grateful for the benefits which he had received, would refuse so small a request, and made at such an impressive moment? But where immense rewards are offered to the faithful attendant; where all the blessings, which heaven and

earth can furnish, are promised to the sincere communicant ; where we thus become partakers of the innocency of Christ, and joint heirs with Him of all that His Father has promised ; where we receive, in this world, increase of hope, confirmation of faith, and the strengthening comforts of the Holy Spirit, and in the world to come, life everlasting ; what can hinder us, what worldly motive can restrain us, like the ungrateful guests in the parable, from the Supper of the Son of God ?

I should, no doubt, be answered, that there are dangers, as well as blessings, in receiving the Communion ; and that no man can be too cautious how he ventures to that table, when he considers the dreadful denunciation of vengeance,—that he, who eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself. But what is this threat supposed to mean ? It can never be thought to imply, that to partake unworthily of this communion is like blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, a sin unpardonable, and never to be repented of. Far from our minds be an idea so horrible ! Like all other sins, it inherits, no doubt, the anger and judgements of God ; —judgements, as we learn from St. Paul, both in this world and in that to come¹: but, like any other sin, an instance of this sort may, by

¹ 1 Cor. xii.

God's grace, and by our subsequent repentance, be, no doubt, wiped clean from our souls.—Far, however, from denying the greatness of the danger, I acknowledge it to be a sin of the deepest dye; and shall endeavour, by pointing out those crimes which have drawn down these curses of God, to enable you to shun them, lest ye also may be punished with the presumptuous and impenitent Christians.

It is, in the first place, very plain that all indecent or disrespectful communicants are guilty of despising the Supper of the Lord, and the Sacrifice of His blessed Body and Blood. Such were the Corinthians of old, who, not content with bread, brought their own separate dishes into the church, and were made drunken with the Holy Wine. Such crimes as these, thank God, are now no longer heard of among Christians. But, secondly, those who take it as a matter of form, without any particular meaning, who receive it merely to qualify themselves for an office, or, out of pure hypocrisy, to deceive the world into a belief of their holiness, those are, no doubt, unworthy receivers of the Sacrament. Those, too, who are not in charity with all mankind, who do not from their hearts forgive all those who have injured them, and do not their best to make amends to all whom they have injured, those cannot safely approach the Table of the Lord. Those, last of all, who con-

tinue still impenitent, who have no intention to forsake their former sins, and no real desire, by Christ's help, to repent and amend, those, also, commit a mockery of God, and disgust Him with an outward form, while their hearts are far from Him. For how can God forgive those, who are themselves unforgiving? How can He clear from guilt those against whom the tears of the injured are crying out for justice? How grant a free and total pardon to a race of incorrigible rebels, who come, at times, to make a formal submission, and relapse again, when forgiven, into all their former excesses.

This is, indeed, a truth so generally admitted, that I am much mistaken if this avowed necessity of repentance is not the real reason of the backwardness of men to repair to this Holy Table. They know the terms of their salvation; and with these terms they will not comply: it is not the fear of the curse denounced against unworthy receivers; but the fear of reformation itself which deters them.

To such as these a very different language must be used; they must be warned of the immediate danger of their situation; and that, whether they communicate or no, there is, in either case, no peace to the wicked. They who are not penitent, must in no wise approach that Holy Table. They who are not penitent! Merciful God, how dare they remain a single day

in a state of such intolerable peril? How in the hourly danger of death and eternal torture, with the sword of God for ever hanging over their heads, how can they sleep or live? They may shun the Altar; they may shun the communion of the faithful;—but can they shun the grave? Can they shun the judgement which is to follow, the fire which burneth for ever? Far be it from me and all my hearers to flatter ourselves with the hopes of a little longer enjoyment, a little longer respite from amendment, before we repair to the Altar of God, and confirm our salvation by a long and steady repentance. Every one of these hours, which pass us unseen;—these minutes which glide away uncounted;—every one is adding something to the load of guilt, some increase to our long debt of repentance. It is on the bed of sickness and of death that these hours and minutes appear in all their value. Go to the dying man, ask him what would he give for one of those days which he has wasted in idleness;—one of those opportunities of communion, which have passed him without a thought. Those opportunities will alas! return no more; the account of those days will soon be closed for ever in judgement.

Turn, then, to the Lord, while He may yet be found; seek Him diligently, before His face is hid for ever. Those darling sins, which you must at last relinquish,—abandon them now,

while your repentance may be as yet accepted. Is repentance difficult? then pray for God's assistance. Is your heart slow to prayer? strive patiently; and His Spirit will, with its unutterable groaning, intercede! And above all, while these impressions are yet alive in your souls, delay not to seal them with the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This will confirm every pious thought; this will strengthen every holy resolution; our hopes, our comforts, will hence be doubly augmented; and, in the strength of this Bread and this Cup, we may walk, like the prophet Elijah after his miraculous repast, through the long wilderness of this dangerous world, to Horeb the mount of God. And may God strengthen us in this our journey, and receive us, at length to His eternal kingdom, for the sake of Him, who hath given His body and His blood for our sakes, and hath left, to our great and endless comfort, these holy Sacraments.

SERMON XII.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

ST. LUKE, viii. 15.

That on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

NOT many serious Christians can be found to whom it has not been, at some time or other, a subject of sorrow and surprise to behold the different manner in which different persons are affected by the same opportunities of knowledge, the same outward calls to repentance and faith and holiness. We may see two men attending the same place of worship ; hearing the same preacher ; with the same examples before their eyes ; and the same blessed promise of God's grace afforded to both of them ; whose lives are, nevertheless, and whose ends will be, as different from each other, as light from darkness,—good from evil,—Heaven from hell : and it is with the preaching of the Gospel, during every generation of mankind, as it was with the judgements of God which befell

the Jewish nation as foretold by our Saviour,—of those who dwell and work together, no two have the same good or evil fortune : and of those who are in the same bed, and of those who grind in the mill together, still one is taken, and the other is left behind.

Reflections of this kind should seem to have arisen in the soul of our blessed Saviour, when, beholding the multitudes who came forth to hear His doctrine, He spake to them the parable of the Sower. He likens, there, the world to a large field of different soils, some worse, some better suited to receive and multiply the seed which was scattered over it ; through all of which alike, whether good or bad, the husbandman was to pass in his daily labour. A foot path crosses one part of the field ; and the corn, which fell there, is trodden under foot of men, and picked up by the fowls of the air. Another part is a stoney and gravelly soil ; whose warmth soon sends up the crop, but whose dryness makes it poor and unfruitful. Another part is richer ground, but foul and choked with thorns and weeds, which grew up with, and soon overtopped the corn ;—and choked the hope of harvest. But, mingled with all these barren plots, are many others of good and fertile mould, whose plentiful increase abundantly makes up for the other disappointments of the husbandman.

This parable our Lord explained to his disci-

ples — to signify that strange and awful difference, which I have already noticed, between the lives of different Christians, and the degrees of attention which they severally pay to God's word, and of improvement which they severally draw from it. “Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.”

Having thus explained the parable, the Son of God concludes with the following words, expressive at once of His love for mankind, and of His gracious desire to convert and save them, and of the awful danger, to which those persons exposed themselves, who were neglectful of such opportunities and means of grace, as the mercy of Heaven afforded them:—“No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they, which enter in, may see the

light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. Take heed, therefore, how ye hear; for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have." As if He had said;—"The intention of my parables is not, as some men may fancy, to keep the world in darkness; they are obscure, indeed, to those who *will not enter in*; who will not become members of my Church; and who will not seek for instruction where it may be found, by knocking at my door in prayer, and entreating farther light from My Spirit to understand the mysteries of my kingdom. But to those, who truly and heartily desire to know My will, that will and that truth shall never remain unknown; nor is there any secret in My dealings with mankind, which shall not, hereafter, be rendered plain to the angels of God, and to the souls of just men made perfect." Take heed then how ye hear; for whosoever hath,—whosoever, that is, shall be found hereafter to have profited duly by the measure of grace and of light afforded to him,—“to him shall be given;” he shall receive more abundant knowledge and holiness from the sanctifying Spirit of God; while whosoever hath not, shall be stripped, at length, of all his outward shew of godliness and wisdom; and shall be exposed to

the inhabitants of either world in his natural blindness and misery :— “ From him shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have.”

As it is, therefore, the declared intention of Christ, that we should draw from all His words everlasting comfort and advantage ; and as so grievous a penalty is threatened against those who refuse them due attention, I shall proceed to explain, as simply as I can, the particular dangers which He may seem to have described to us, in the parable of the sower and his field, and the means whereby those dangers may best be avoided or conquered.

The first kind of men, to whom the Gospel of Christ is preached in vain, are they, from whose hearts, while they hear the word, the devil takes away the knowledge and feeling of those truths which might else have moved their souls to faith and repentance, and might have brought forth, in their conduct, the fruits of holiness and life without end. This is what Satan is ready to attempt with all men ; and he is generally most successful with those whom our Lord compares to the public and beaten path ; who pass their lives entirely in the world ; whose hearts are hardened with that sort of experience which a continued round of company and conversation produces ; and where, consequently, the furrows of a good education, even where such has been afforded

them, are beaten into a smooth and level surface which is easy to pass over; but into which nothing sinks; and on which the gracious dews of Heaven descend in vain. When such as these attend the house of God, it is the object of the devil to keep them from attending seriously to what is passing there, by filling their heads with unseasonable recollections of the world and worldly things, by drawing off their eyes and their thoughts to any object, how trifling soever, rather than to the will of God and their own eternal happiness. You will see the eyes of men like these wandering round the building of the church, or the faces of the congregation, seldom resting in one place, and never, even for a moment, marked with that seriousness which becomes a penitent sinner in the peculiar presence of his Saviour and his God. They whisper to their neighbours; they turn over the pages of their books; or, if they seem composed and thoughtful, their thoughts, it is to be feared, are all engaged with those trifles, or that business, in which only they are accustomed to seek for happiness. When the service is over, ask them what they have heard; and they will not be able to give a reasonable answer. "Satan has taken the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe, and be saved!" To men like these it may be of use, perhaps, to consider, that whatever worldly or wicked or foolish thoughts arise in their minds

thus unseasonably, are, in truth, no less certainly visitations of the evil spirit, than if they could behold his wings waving over their heads, and his talons snatching from their souls those truths, on the knowledge of which their eternal salvation may, perhaps, depend. The danger of their situation may, perhaps, compose their minds to that calm fixedness, that fear of God and reverence of His word, which the Tempter must ever assault in vain : and the thought of Heaven, or Hell, may be employed to scare off the spoilers from their prey.

A second sort of men, and their condition is little less hopeless than that of those who never attend to the word at all, are those who feel keenly, but not deeply, the goodness and justice of God, and the truth and awful consequence of what they hear ; — who receive the word with joy, but whose hearts have not sufficient steadiness to continue in their good resolutions. “ They for a while believe ; and in time of temptation fall away.”

The manner, in which this infirmity of purpose shews itself, can require no explanation : the only means, whereby we can remedy it, are, first, a watchfulness to avoid temptation ; secondly, a constant habit of prayer to God to deliver us from it ; and thirdly, since our danger arises from being affected too much with present objects, it is wise, when new fears or hopes

arise, and we are tempted to forget those more reasonable hopes and fears, which we have felt on former occasions, to recollect, that what we once acknowledged to be true is, at present, no less true than it was before : that, when we first resolved to become religious, we knew, as well as we do at present, that temptations and difficulties must arise ; and that a wavering and inconstant behaviour is no less scorned by men, than it is threatened with the severest displeasure of God. “ If any man draw back,” saith the Apostle, “ my soul shall have no pleasure in him.”¹ “ Whosoever,” saith God the Son, “ is ashamed of Me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in His own glory and in His Father’s and of the holy angels ! ”²

There is another description of persons who receive the word ; and whose hearts are of a richer and a deeper soil, than those of whom I have just been speaking ; but that soil is not kept clean. The seed is sown ; and it takes good root ; and it springs up in due season ; but tares also, and weeds, and thistles, spring together with it, and overtop it, and render it unfruitful. The cares, or the riches, or the pleasures, of this life take up too much of their time and affec-

¹ Heb. x. 38.

² St. Luke, ix. 26.

tions ; and to them, their religious principles are sacrificed.

Now the mistake of these men consists in fancying that religion, and the world, and its sinful and immoderate pursuits, and pleasures, may agree very well together. They are perfectly aware that religion is the one thing most needful ; that it is, like corn, by far the most valuable thing in their field ; but they will not be persuaded, that, like corn, religion must be well weeded of every thing, which is contrary to its nature, and interferes with its growth and ripening. Such a sin, they will tell us, such an evil passion, such an unlawful pleasure, is too trifling to do any great harm ; such an one is too agreeable to be easily parted with. Such another has been so long indulged, or spreads so widely, that it will cost infinite pain and trouble, to destroy it.

Now, my friends, reflect a moment with yourselves ; if, of the weeds and thorns which spring up amid your young corn, you were to spare some, because there were not many of the kind ; others, because their purple flowers were pleasing to the eye ; others, because they were so numerous, and so deeply rooted, that to root them out completely would require much labour ; what would, in such a case, become of your year's provision ? We cannot, if we would, disguise it from ourselves ! Where a weed grows,

a blade of corn cannot : if our religion does not teach us to overcome the cares, and riches, and pleasures of the world ; those cares, and riches, and pleasures will soon overcome our religion : and the very best natural disposition may be as completely spoiled by neglected bad habits, and by evil affections indulged in, as the finest soil, unweeded, may be rendered good for nothing but thorns and thistles.

“ What, then, are they, the good ground, whose furrows repay many fold, the seed and the labour bestowed on them ? Which are those honest and good hearts, which receive the word, and keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience ? ” They, who, in the first place, resist the wiles of Satan ; and attend to what they hear. They who, secondly, are careful, by prayer and by serious thoughts, to enrich their hearts with godly wisdom and resolution ; and who pluck up, as they spring, whatever immoderate or sinful passions would overtop, or entangle, their course. These are the good ground, whose fruit is holiness ; and their harvest, life without end ; — in that day, when the weeds, and tares, and thistles of this world, shall be burnt in fire unquenchable !

Let us, then, as being surrounded with so many and so great dangers, take heed how we hear : and work out our own salvation with all diligence, with fear and trembling :—and let us, on the other hand, not despair ; inasmuch as

each of these several dangers, which I have reckoned up, is capable of its proper remedy. The footpath may be stopped, while the seed is growing: and cannot we, for one day, at least, in seven, allow some time, from the conversation of the world, to serious thought and to prayer to God, that His word may not be preached to us in vain? The birds may, with a little trouble, be chased away; and if, with hearty resolution we resist the Devil, God's word has taught us, that he will, in like manner, flee from us.

The stony and shallow soil may be enriched, and deepened, by mixing it with better mold; and the irresolute Christian, who delights in the company of pious men and in good books, will find his heart grow daily stronger, and better fitted to bear fruit to ripeness. The thorns and thistles may, one by one, be completely cleared away; and he, who will not spare any single sin, will purify, at length, his heart, even as the heart of Jesus Christ was pure! But however good our natural ground may be, and whatever be the pains which we bestow on it, that fertility and those pains will signify nothing, if the blessing of God be wanting. Our field may be sown, and fenced, and manured, and weeded: but no corn will rise, or ripen, unless the dews of Heaven descend in kindly rain; and unless the glorious sunshine warms the stalk and tender ear. Let us then, above all things, pray to God, that the

grace of His Holy Spirit may soften our hearts, and render them fruitful; and that He, who came into the world to call sinners to repentance, would enable us, by His blessing, to work that holiness, of which He was Himself the great example.

It is a custom, which the common feeling of Christians has rendered sacred, not to enter, or depart from, this Holy Place; nor to assemble for the purpose of hearing the word of God;—without first, in a whispered prayer, entreating His good blessing that we may not pray, or hear, in vain. I will not ask, how many there are among you, with whom this custom has passed into an idle form. I will not ask, how many cover their faces, and say nothing; but this I will say, that more and worthier honour would be paid to God's house; and more souls, by far than now escape, would be snatched from sin and everlasting misery; if, when you thus give outward tokens of your reverence, you would beg the help of your Almighty Father in some words like these, “Oh God, without Thee I am not able to please Thee; but may Thy spirit, this day, both teach me the things which belong to my peace, and preserve them in my faith and recollection; so that the seed, which Thou sowest, may prosper in my heart, till that day when Thy blessed Son shall return to reap His harvest!”

SERMON XIII.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

PART I.

I COR. xiii. 2.

*Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains,
and have not charity, I am nothing.*

To understand the meaning of the present text, as well as of the whole chapter, a very instructive and important one, which has been read to you in the Epistle of to-day, the following observations will not be without their use.

The societies, or Churches, for their meaning is the same, which the apostle founded in different countries, under the government of bishops, and the preaching and administration of elders,—were exposed, from the nature of things, to very great and opposite errors. Some of them were, at first, chiefly composed of Jews, who were proud of the ancient privileges of their nation; and unwillingly believed that circumcision and sacrifices were no longer necessary to salvation.

Others had been heathens and idolaters, accustomed to very irregular and sinful habits, which it was difficult for them to unlearn, and who were unable to distinguish between pardon for sins committed, and a licence for committing them. The clergy too, and the people, being, alike, new converts, were alike in want of instruction and direction ; not only as to the doctrines of Christianity, but as to the common ceremonies of a Church, the posture of prayer, and the manner of receiving the Sacrament. Nor was this all ;—it pleased the Almighty, for the sake of spreading more effectually the glad tidings of Christ, to give to many of the preachers certain miraculous powers, such as healing the sick, casting out devils, speaking with unknown tongues, and foretelling things to come. Powers of this sort, it may be well supposed, would draw great attention and reverence to those who possessed them ; and the natural effect which such praise of men is apt to produce, was produced in many of the new-made ministers of the Gospel. They grew vain of their own consequence, and fancied themselves better Christians than those, who could not do the same wonders which they performed : while, on the other hand, those, who were outshone by them in prophesying or miracle, seem to have sometimes murmured at their own deficiencies, and to have felt a silly envy of those gifts which God had bestowed on their brethren.

Besides, as these gifts of the Spirit were not all of one sort,—as of twelve ministers, for example, in one great town, two might be prophets, one an interpreter of tongues, one able to cast out devils, and the remainder without any so conspicuous or particular mark of the Divine favour, we may easily suppose, not only that those, who were not thus gifted, would envy such as were ; but that the gifted persons would feel a silly emulation against each other ; and each maintain that his own powers were the most wonderful. The caster-out of devils boasted a faith which could also remove mountains ; the speaker in strange languages reminded his hearers of this convincing proof of the presence of the Holy Ghost ; and the prophet urged the excellency and value of a knowledge of future events ; and that it was God Himself who spake by his tongue.

With the Jewish converts, indeed, who were more accustomed to witness such wonders, less of this was likely to happen : but among the Gentile Church it was, probably, a very prevailing and dangerous evil. Among those of Corinth and Achaia, it certainly was so ;—to such an extent, as to call forth the exhortation of St. Paul, in the 12th chapter of the present epistle. In the former chapters, he had re-proved the Christians of that wealthy and debauched country, for the many points in which

they conformed to their former heathen associates ; — in eating meat offered to idols ; in irregular and incestuous marriages ; in their indecent manner of public worship ; and in their shameful gluttony and drunkenness at the Holy Sacrament. He then goes on to allude to the circumstances, which I have just mentioned, namely, to the envying and emulation, which the power of working miracles, and of speaking with tongues had occasioned among them. He reminds them, that all these things were instituted for the common good ;—that some had one ministry ; some, another ; yet their Lord and Master was the same : that however variously the gifts of the Spirit were divided, yet was it the same Spirit which was given to every believer ; and that he, who had grace given him to believe and to confess that Jesus was the Son of God, was as good a Christian, and, so far as he himself was concerned, as real a temple of the Holy Ghost, as he who could confess the same truth in all the languages of Babel. The people, he continues, were not to think themselves overlooked, because they were not appointed preachers ; the preachers were not to grudge that they were not all prophets and workers of miracles ; but all were to use the grace given them, for the good of the whole body, not for their private advancement, and for the gratification of selfish vanity :—remembering, that,

as being limbs of the same body, none should encroach on the office of his neighbour, or think himself independant ; but that all in their station should do their best for the society, as feet, and hands, and eyes, and tongues are exercised in their several capacities for the maintenance of the body to which they all belong, and in the welfare of which they all alike are sharers. If all were preachers or prophets, who would there be to hear? If all worked miracles, a miracle would cease to be miraculous. "But," continues the apostle, for here he foresaw no objection, "covet earnestly the best gifts."

The objection to his arguments would be this, "How," might the Christians say, "is there then no difference in the dignity and usefulness of these several powers of glorifying God, and of bringing the knowledge of Salvation to mankind? Is the simple believer as profitable to the Church, as he who prophesies? or can the weak Christian, who doubts and trembles, give that help to his brethren which the strong faith of the worker of miracles can? Surely then, they would say, we may, if not for our own sakes, yet for the sake of God's Church, be anxious to excel, and be eager after the power of edifying others."

This would have been the Corinthians' answer; and this Paul foresees and replies to, in this permission, "covet earnestly the best gifts." It is, as if he had said, "You do very

right, I allow, to be zealous for your own improvement, and it is but natural to wish to excel ; but in the way you now desire to distinguish yourselves, the ground is occupied already. You cannot all be apostles, or preachers, or workers of miracles ;—but there is one way, in which you may all exert yourselves to the common advantage of men, and to the glory of God ;—a far more excellent way, than any which we have yet mentioned. We cannot all work miracles ; but we may all love one another, even as Christ has loved us.”

This is the train of argument which leads the apostle to that beautiful praise of charity which we read in the present chapter ; in which he first shews, that, without a real love for God and man, no spiritual grace, or outward action, can save us from being ourselves cast away. Secondly, he lays down a few of the most conspicuous marks, by which true charity may be known ; and lastly, proves that, neither the power of prophecy, or that of working miracles, or any other power, can compare, either in duration, or in dignity, with those feelings which are to constitute our chief enjoyment in that Heaven, to which they shew the way ;—in that state, where neither prophecy, nor miracle, will be any more required ; where all distinctions of rank, or of knowledge, or of power, will be equalized ;

and where the God of love and charity will be all in all.

Whatever my faith or knowledge may be, saith St. Paul, and however I use them to the conversion of others, though I preach the Gospel with the tongue of men and angels, yet if my preaching do not flow from a desire to do good, from a love of my brethren, I am like sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. The sweet or lofty sounds, which such musical instruments utter, may move the passions of those who hear them ;—but the drum, or the cymbal, remains itself unaffected. The brass hears not the music, which so deeply affects the multitude ; and, though the soldier may glow with patriotic ardour, the trumpet, which rouses him, partakes not in his valour. And thus it is with him who, while he preaches to others, is himself a castaway. He may speak, and speak well and satisfactorily—of faith, and righteousness, and a judgement to come ; but if he only speaks to shew his own talents, if his sermon is not prompted by a desire to bring salvation to his hearers, if, in short, he preaches from any other motive than charity, his hearers may, indeed, be warned by his means ; but, for himself, he surely cannot be profited.

There have been some prophets and apostles of God who have been wicked men : and this naturally brings us to the second division of the

first part of the apostle's argument, where he assures us, that neither knowledge nor faith can save us ; unless that knowledge and faith produce their natural fruits, and shew themselves in fervent love. " If I have all faith," said he, " so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing."

On this text a very needless difficulty has been raised, respecting the nature of the faith meant ; as if in fear that any thing derogatory should be implied against that which is the fountain head of our salvation. And a distinction has been made between saving faith, and that which cannot save ; as if they were separate principles, or as if a spurious principle, or any principle but the true, could give the power of working miracles. The fact is, that faith is confessedly nothing more than a simple act of the mind agreeing to the truth of certain things revealed. A stedfast faith is the constant recollection of those truths ; and an earnest faith is a more perfect and absolute assurance of them. These are all the distinctions, of which faith itself is capable ; those feelings which ought to spring from faith, such as hope, charity, obedience, are the fruits, indeed ; but not the tree : and, as the tree may exist without its fruit, so faith may, and often unhappily does exist in a state of spiritual barrenness ; nay, sometimes, the fruits, which it brings forth, are such, as, indeed, edify our neighbours ; but

—as to our own salvation—are powerless altogether. It is in this sense, that the apostle says, “If I had all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.” The next sentence which follows is, if possible, still more extraordinary. “Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”

We have seen, already, two of the most common boasts of the Corinthian zealots, the speaking with tongues, and the working of miracles, declared to be useless without charity; and therefore it follows, that they may be found without it. Many, too, we may be sure would also boast of the sacrifices which they had made; of the fortunes, which they had given to the common funds of the saints; and of the perils, which they encountered by the confession of Christianity. These too, St. Paul assures us, both almsdeeds, and sufferings, and martyrdom, are useless to our salvation, if our heart be all the while a stranger to the flame of charity.

But here a very serious difficulty arises; what is charity, if this be not? What stronger symptoms of love for God, and man, can there be than such bounty in the relief of man; such courage and constancy in the service of God? Who, that did not love the poor, would give his fortune for their nourishment? Who, that did not love

God, would be burnt alive in His cause? A little attention, however, to the character of men, will remove the objection; and open to our view a strange and melancholy prospect of the inconsistencies of the human heart.

As this, however, would take up more time, than we can spare at present; and as there remains much more in the present chapter which will require explanation, I will defer its consideration till the evening: when I shall hope, by God's help, to give you sufficient directions to distinguish between all pompous pretensions to charity, and that true and godlike love which is not confined to particular situations; and does not depend on the extent of the talents committed to our charge; which may be as truly felt, and as effectually exercised, by the widow who gives her mite; or by the still poorer sufferer who can only contribute his prayers; as by the wealthiest and most powerful of the servants of God on earth.

In the mean time, a very important lesson may be drawn, even from the unfinished argument which has now been offered to you. It is, that a man's outward actions derive all their value from the motives which give them birth; from the feelings of faith, of hope, and of love, which prompt the apostle, in his missions; the saint, in his miracles; the rich, in their almsgiving; and the martyr, in his sufferings. All these out-

ward actions have only a relative value : and, if we wish either to imitate their splendour, or to partake of their blessings, we must first begin by purifying our hearts by repentance, and strengthening our resolution by prayer. These are the corner stones of the Temple of the Holy Ghost, and where these do not exist, He will never dwell. May they increase and abound more and more in your hearts ; and in his, who now addresses you !

SERMON XIV.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

PART II.

I COR. xiii. 3.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

IN fulfilment of my promise, I now return to the consideration of charity, or love,—for the meaning of both is one, under the several lights, by which St. Paul enforces it on our thoughts and practice. I have already explained to you, how it was his intention to shew its pre-eminence, not only over all other virtues, but over all the gifts of the Holy Ghost, even when those gifts were miraculous. None of those powers, he tells us, for the possession of which the Corinthians were so anxious, and in which they so much boasted themselves;—neither the faculty of speaking with unknown tongues, a gift with which some of the early Christians were favoured, and which was considered as an unerring mark of the favour

of the Most High, — nor the power, by faith, of working miracles the most extraordinary, were of any value to the salvation of their possessor, unless they were sanctified, and rendered acceptable, by the united love of God and man.

Assertions, these, of themselves not a little appalling, since we can hardly conceive a wicked man so favoured by the Almighty as to be possessed of miraculous powers. Yet if we consider that such marvellous gifts were entrusted to the preachers of Christianity, not for their own benefit, but for the conversion of others; that God has, in every age of the world, been often pleased to make use of wicked or worldly men as the preachers of His truth, and the instruments of His glory; and that, among those first selected by Christ, and endued by Him with the same miraculous powers as the rest, we discover the name of Judas, we must acknowledge, that the faith, even of an apostle, may exist without necessarily producing the fruits of love in our hearts; and that even an apostle may preach the word, and raise the dead, and cast out devils, and yet, while he is the means of salvation to others, be, all the while, himself a castaway. It may, indeed, very greatly lessen our apparent inferiority to the early ages of the Church, when we observe, from the conduct of these Corinthians, that the power of working miracles did not necessarily exempt its possessors from the

common failings of mortality : and that, sometimes, the jealousy and emulation, which such powers produced, were, in themselves, the occasion of falling.

St. Paul, then, in the former verses of the present chapter, had been correcting the Corinthians, for laying so much stress on the miraculous gifts which were only the means of spreading Christianity,— to the neglect of that spirit of brotherly love, which is, in truth, Christianity itself. He now proceeds to two other sources of invidious comparison among each other, namely, the extent of their sufferings in the cause of Christ, and of their contributions to their poorer brethren. Many of the Corinthians had, doubtless, even then, been persecuted for the Gospel ; many, too, had given up a great part, or perhaps the whole of their possessions, to the common funds of the Gospel ; and their merits, as well as the supernatural gifts, which we have just mentioned, were made, as it should seem, a subject of loud and angry emulation.

To check such unchristian tempers, the apostle declares, that neither sacrifices of money, nor of life itself, neither mercy the most unbounded to the poor, nor martyrdom the most painful, in the cause of Christ, could at all avail to save a soul ; unless it were warmed and consecrated by a real and fervent Christianity. Here, however, a material difficulty will arise. We cannot conceive

any stronger or more convincing proof of that love, from which all our actions derive their value in the sight of God, than is afforded in the instances here given. Of the martyrs, indeed, though their love should seem established by the severest trial, — “greater love hath no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friend ;”—yet, we find but in too many instances, even of those who have given this greatest proof of their devotion to God, that some have been grievously wanting in a Christian love towards their brethren. Many have died in God’s cause, whose lives have been strangely inconsistent with their confession ; and some, who have themselves undergone martyrdom, had themselves been guilty of inflicting it on others.

But the instance of giving all our goods to the poor, and being, at the same time, deficient in charity, will not admit of so easy an explanation. It is not, in the present instance, that lazy and selfish bounty which flings its scanty alms to the beggar in the street, not to relieve his want, but to be rid of his importunity. It is not that cold and customary contribution, which is exacted from us by fashion ; or by the usual habits of our rank and station. These might well be considered, as proceeding from sources very far inferior to the principle of Christian love. But the case here mentioned is one of great and uncommon bounty, great and very seldom equalled

self-denial in the cause of humanity ;—self-denial indeed, such as we must seek for, in the early times of Christianity only. And if this be not charity, what can be said to deserve the name? What better proof can be desired of inward benevolence, than that outward symptom, to which, by the common experience of mankind, the name itself of Charity is appropriated? Such would be the natural reflections of men; nor is it the sentence of men only, which will decide on the purity of our inward feelings, by the excellence of our outward and visible actions. So surely is the tree made known by its fruits, that God Himself, the Searcher of hearts, decides by the same infallible rule: and the reasons given by Him, for the acceptance of any one into His Kingdom are, that he has clothed the naked, fed the hungry, received the stranger, visited the sick and the prisoner. I have given this objection in its strongest colours; because it really is a very strong one, and because I consider it as very unwise and very unnecessary to shrink from the force of any objection which may be made to a text in Scripture. The explanation, however, will be found in the inconsistency, not of the Sacred Writings, but of the human nature which they describe; and its difficulty will be easily removed, if we consider, that the magnificent acts of bounty, of which the Corinthians were vain, were of the nature of public dona-

tions. They were collections for the use of the poor Christians in Judæa, at that time suffering by famine ; which were made, as appears by the different epistles of St. Paul, in all the Churches of Greece and Asia, but in which the Corinthians, as being a very wealthy and a very liberal community, appear to have taken the lead.

Now, it may be allowed as a fact, which is established not only by our common experience, but by the words of God Himself, that a steady and persevering devotion of our thoughts, our time, and our property, to the relief of the poor, must either find a man really charitable, or will, by degrees, make him so. But with such splendid and conspicuous acts of bounty, as those which I have mentioned, the case is somewhat different.

Such is the weakness of man, and so much greater is his unwillingness to persevere, than to begin, in well doing, that consistency is, I fear, the most rare, as it certainly is, the most valuable, of our mental habits. Singular as it may seem, it is not at rare and splendid sacrifices that human resolution stumbles. In them we have the applause, or, at least, the wonder of the world, to support us : and the knowledge, that the effort will be a short one, gives us, of itself, a greater courage to attempt it, and a greater energy to succeed in it. We all of us may have felt that, in collecting our strength for a single leap or a

single blow, we not only felt a spirit, which carried us further ; but a real power of doing more, than we should have had, if we looked forward to repeating the same act frequently. Nor, in the common intercourse of life, are the cases said to be rare, when persons who are covetous and mean in the little actions of every day, are not incapable of very splendid bounty on particular occasions ; and when such occasions are likely to occur but seldom : — who subscribe liberally to public institutions, whilst they harden their hearts against the beggar at their door, or the widow in their neighbourhood ; and who would find it easier to give up at once, and to the management of others, a far greater sum, than that which they bestow on the poor, now that they have the trouble, and the self denial, of themselves distributing it. To pour out their talent, at once, and in one full stream of bounty, is a trial in which they would not be found wanting ; but it goes to their very soul to part with it drop by drop.

And as it is evident that such men as these can lay no claim to the character of being steadily and consistently charitable, so it is also evident that it might be very possible to give in this manner, large sums to the poor, without ever kindling in our own hearts that lovely interest in their wants and distresses, that power of rejoicing in their joy, and of grieving with their grief, which can only arise from long continued

familiarity with their sufferings, their hopes, and their fears. I do not mean to undervalue public charities, God forbid! far less is it my intention to discourage their provident mercy, who lay up, at the beginning of every year, a certain proportion of their income to be separated, and hallowed, to the use of the poor. But I do mean to say, that, unless we give up some share of our time, as well as of our riches, to the service of our brethren; unless we are ourselves the stewards and dispensers of our own alms, we cannot produce, in an equal degree, those feelings of the heart, from which alone all almsgiving derives its value in the sight of God.

Nor is this all, while we are employed every day in doing good, however small the individual actions may be, yet habits of mildness and affection will be produced, not only to the objects of our benevolence, but to all the world besides. This course of little attentions has a natural tendency to soften the heart; to tame its prejudices, and passions; and to teach us to fling away, like the good Samaritan, all remembrance of party, or bigotry; and to imitate, in the wide circle of our affections, the mercies of our great Creator. It is otherwise with him, who only subscribes liberally to institutions managed by others. The effect which such acts of munificence produce on the mind, is love for ourselves, rather than sympathy for other men; and it is

very possible that, notwithstanding such occasional displays of bounty, our passions may remain unchastened, our tempers may be unsoftened, and that the general course of our lives may be austere and haughty and unforgiving.—This has been remarkably proved in many famous zealots among the friars of the Romish Church, who have exhibited a strange and lamentable contrast of unbounded liberality and contempt of wealth, on the one hand, with a fierce and bloody resentment, on the other, against all who differed from them in opinion. Many of those wicked persecutors, whose cruelties are related in the large book, which is kept at the east end of this church, had given up ample fortunes, and reduced themselves to a voluntary poverty, for some religious or charitable purpose ; and yet these very men, who gave their goods to feed the poor, did not hesitate to kill and burn and torture, in the most cruel manner, their more faithful and enlightened brethren.

Of the same spirit with these, and, perhaps, only differing in their want of power, were the almsgiving zealots of Corinth. They, too, might boast the sacrifices which they made for the poor ; but they too were uncharitable in their opinions, wrathful in their language, and turning the graces of God, and their own good deeds, into occasions of envy, of wrath, and of pride.—It appears, then, that, though a habit of mercy

long continued and steadily persevered in, be indeed inseparable from real charity, yet there may be singular and remarkable instances of bounty, in which the heart of the giver is very little concerned; and by which his general habits of thinking and acting are not at all affected. Not that such instances are not in themselves commendable;—not that they are not in many cases necessary symptoms of charity; in which he, who is deficient, can hardly, with truth, lay claim to any real love for mankind. Nor must it be for a moment fancied, that we are not called upon, by every tie which binds a follower of Christ, to do all the good in our power to all men, and under all circumstances whatever. We must no more neglect public charities, under pretence of private ones, than excuse ourselves from private acts of mercy, by the blaze and dazzle of an occasional public subscription. But we must remember, for it is a point in which our salvation is concerned, we must, I say, remember, that it is our general good habits, not our single good action, which must approve us faithful in the sight of God; and that neither public almsgiving, nor almsgiving itself, is the whole, though it be in truth the most considerable part, of the grace of charity.

But charity, continues the apostle, giving other and equally necessary marks of brotherly love, charity is not alone shewn in our bounties,

though without such bounty there can be no true charity. We must not flatter ourselves, by alms-deeds alone to fulfil this obligation, if we neglect the other graces of temper, and of behaviour, which a real love produces. To suffer long, to be kind, to envy not, not to vaunt ourselves, not to be proud, not to behave unseemly, not to be easily provoked, to think no evil, not to rejoice in the faults of an enemy, but to rejoice in his virtues, to bear, to believe, to hope, and to endure whatever may promote the happiness, or the salvation, of a fellow creature ;—these are no less necessary marks of charity : and wherever these are not found, no real love, we may be sure, can dwell. To enlarge on these at present, the time would hardly serve ; but I cannot dismiss you without again recalling to your memory, what was laid down in the early part of my discourse,—that the surest, and indeed the only, way to produce in our heart both these, and every other lovely sentiment, is by active and persevering and condescending acts of mercy ; by seizing on every opportunity of doing all the good in our power ; and by giving up our time and attention, our comfort, and counsel, as well as our money, to the relief and assistance of the poor.

Nor is this the only lesson, which I would wish to imprint on your minds. Who is there who, on reading the present chapter, can avoid reflecting on the great importance of consistency

in our conduct both towards God and man? If the martyr, who gave his body to be burned, were not accepted, unless to his faith in God, he united forgiveness and affection to mankind; if the Corinthian, who gave all he had to the poor, were not accounted charitable, when his zeal was embittered by bigotry, or his heart clouded with pride; how unreasonable is it to expect that Heaven, (which is only promised to the perfect,) by any favourable balance of our good against our evil qualities, or by the practice of part of our duty, while we neglect the remainder of it?

I will go yet further—how necessary is it, imperfect as our best services both are and ever must be, how necessary is it, I say, to place our confidence of safety and our hopes of Heaven, not on our own belief, our own knowledge, or our own practice, but on the merits and mercies alone of our Lord Jesus Christ!

SERMON XV.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

1 COR. xv. 22.

As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

OUR Holy Church, to make us sensible of the natural wants of man, and of the benefits which he receives through Christ; and by these considerations to predispose our hearts to that sorrow for sin, which should distinguish Lent, and that thankfulness for mercy and salvation, with which Easter ought to be celebrated,—for these reasons, as I apprehend,—begins at this time of year her course of lessons taken from the Scriptures. You heard very lately read to you the creation of the human race and their miserable fall; and are prepared by the obscure prophecy of the seed of a woman, who should bruise the serpent's head, to expect, that you are speedily to celebrate the hard battle and glorious triumph of Jesus the Son of Mary, who is also in the Scripture distinguished by the name of the second

Adam.¹ In these words of the Apostle we have, in a very short compass, the general principles of the Christian religion ; which may be said to depend, almost entirely, on original sin and imputed righteousness ;—for, as Adam was to all mankind, the author of a mortal life on earth, so was Jesus Christ the author of resurrection from the dead, and of life eternal, in the world to come.

As, in order to feel and know the value of our cure, it is necessary to comprehend the extent of our former disease, I shall treat to-day of Adam's history, and endeavour to shew you, how justly and how mercifully God has dealt with him and his descendants ; and what cause we have for thankfulness and holy fear, lest we should be found ungrateful despisers of the great salvation which has been offered to us.

It was, in the first place, very necessary and very worthy of the wisdom of God, that all mankind should proceed from one common parent ; that, springing from one blood, and having in common the same hope and interest, they might consider each other in the light, and with the affection, of brethren. It is no objection to say, that the wickedness of mankind has, in part, rendered this object vain ;—it is still greatly answered by that voice of nature which can

¹ Verse 45.

never be entirely extinguished ; and, without which, society would itself be a den of lions. We know, by very instinct, the force of a common descent ; and we know, that the cruelties practised against the unfortunate negroes, were increased, and attempted to be justified, under the false and impious notion that they were of another and inferior race of men. Against such doctrines as these, in the very first act of creation, God expressly guarded.

With equal wisdom was Adam first formed as a witness to the creation of Eve ; and a part of his own body was chosen for this purpose, both to prove to her the power of that God who could make all things from nothing ; and that he might know and feel her kindred nature ; and that she was of the same materials with himself. And to increase this feeling of affection, he was made, we find, to experience the want of a companion ; and kept for some time in loneliness ; that he might know how necessary they were to each other ; and might cherish and love more tenderly the help-mate, which he had so much desired.

And, though the simplicity of this early history of the world, the rude and helpless state in which its first inhabitants appear, has been made by some an objection to its probability ; yet, if fairly examined, we shall find it most worthy of the wisdom of God, and of His love for the hu-

man race. It would have been as easy for Him to have filled the world, at once, with a civilized and learned population ; and to have given them, from their very creation, all the arts and sciences, which bring comfort to the present state of society. But the whole regular course of His dispensations would have thus been overturned, which ordained that man should acquire power and experience together ; and that, under the guidance of Providence, every improvement should be effected by the development of his own energies. Supposing that a child possessed, at first, the strength, and growth, and inclinations of a man ; what else could be expected, than, that without experience to direct those powers, he should turn them to the destruction of others and of himself? Such would have been the situation of mankind, if thrown at once, without the experience arising from gradual improvement, into the powers and temptations of civilized society. But now they were as infants in God's hand : their language was gradually taught by Him ; by Him their hands were instructed ; and, till they should be able to use their knowledge, or to struggle with difficulty, they were laid, in ignorance and plenty, on the warm lap of Paradise.

It is for this reason God takes them from the common chances and dangers incident to their state ; and places them in one favoured garden, adorned, we are told, with all delightful

plants, and all that were desirable for food: where, with little labour, and no care or sorrow, they pass their happy days, conversing with God continually, and walking evermore in the light of His countenance. And that no fear or sickness might approach this happy spot, the tree of Life was planted in the midst; a tree to which God had given the power of healing all diseases, and of preserving life; or which, to speak more properly, was the Sacrament and outward sign of the spiritual grace, which preserved the man from sickness and from death.

For this preservation from death, I must here observe, was merely the effect of the free grace of the Almighty; which preserved, by a never ceasing miracle, the bodily powers of man from decaying, and from weakness, and hoary hair, and trembling; and which hindered death from attacking his frame, and weighing it down to the dust. For man was not naturally immortal; nor was his body stronger than oak, or iron, or marble; all of which decay, and crumble into dust, by time. And though our souls do not necessarily perish with the body; yet is that soul supported in life and existence, by the free and uncontrolled mercy of God alone.

Immortality, then,—above all, a happy immortality—was to Adam the free and undeserved gift of God: and God might justly lay what commands on him He judged necessary; since all

which he could do was far inferior,—was a mere nothing,—in comparison with the benefits which he had received from his Maker. What then were the commands, what the covenant and conditions, on which God promised to man eternal life and eternal happiness? The condition was simply one; so easy, too, that nothing could be devised more lenient or merciful. In the garden and close by the tree of Life, was one goodly tree; and, as God himself told them, of rare and wonderful virtues; which, however, was never to be tasted, touched, or handled; on pain of losing all that the Almighty had given, and all that He promised, of being shut out for ever from that happy garden, and of toiling on the earth a painful and laborious life, till, like the ox or the ass, they went down, without hope, or comfort, to the grave. All this was entirely consistent with Almighty wisdom and goodness: for no means so fit could be found, for keeping in check the evil desires of the heart, as one single trial always before their eyes; which might practise them every day in obedience to their Maker, and in denying themselves, and their unruly wishes. All other temptations were removed; but this one easy trial was purposely left in the way. It served always to remind them, that the garden was not theirs, but God's; that it was His mercy, which allowed them to be there at all; and that He might exclude them from all the trees, as well

as from the one. And by practising them in daily self-denial and obedience, it served to weaken all fleshly lusts ; to wean them from those wants, and wishes, which cling to the body ; and to make them more fit, in God's good time, to be removed by Him to Heaven ; and to pass there an eternity of praise and glory, with their elder brethren, the angels.

For most learned men are of opinion that this may be, without rashness, conjectured to be the end for which God had mercifully destined man ; — to fill up, in Heaven, the room of those miserable angels, who, with Satan at their head, had been driven from the seats of happiness. And, for this reason, they observe, was the Devil so envious of man ; and sought, under the disguise of a serpent, to mar the work of the Creator ; and to provoke Him to destroy the creature whom He was about to raise from dust to glory.

Man, according to this opinion, was placed on earth, to be educated for Heaven ; to be fitted here, by light and easy trials of his faith and obedience, for that blessed company of faithful and obedient spirits, who see the face of God, and rejoice to yield Him honour and worship. Human folly, however, or, to speak more truly, human disobedience and want of faith, deprived him of this glorious hope. For we may observe, it was his faith in God, which the Devil sought

first—to undermine. “Ye shall not surely die,” were his words to the woman. He wished to persuade her, that God had told a falsehood; and had, from selfish motives, desired to keep knowledge to Himself alone. Thus did our first parents, by hearkening to him, express their willingness to believe any one sooner than God! What madness was this, and what wickedness! Not to remain content with what God had given; but to grasp at the whole; to desire to be Gods; to be equal with their Maker; and to snatch from Him that power which He had used towards them so kindly.

It was gluttony; for the tree was good to look upon; and they thought, on the testimony of the Devil, that it was good for food. It was pride;—for they would no longer be subjects; but longed to be equal with their Maker. It was robbery and sacrilege; for the tree was not theirs, but God’s; the only portion of the world which He had reserved, and sanctified for Himself. All else, besides this one thing, He had given to them; and this one tree they envied Him. What a number of commandments here are broken; how many vicious principles set at work in the soul by the slight temptation of an apple! Well might they tremble, and hide themselves, when their eyes were opened; when they awoke to the knowledge of God’s wrath; when they found themselves naked mortal creatures,—

stripped of that righteousness with which God had clothed them as with a garment, that Holy Spirit which was now departed for ever!

For what help was there, if their death were a little while deferred? — yet were they to leave this Paradise, to lose all grace and comfort of the Almighty, and to feed on the fruits of hard and bitter labour; till hoary hairs, or disease, or those calamities, which sin was about to bring on the world, should weigh them down to the dust from which they sprung. What was now that high prerogative of rule over the animals, that force and wisdom which were able to tame the strongest; what that rational soul, the last remains of God's image, and that knowledge, that fatal knowledge, which they bought so dearly,—without the blessing and protection of God? What, but so many means of sinning more grievously, and of making themselves and their neighbours more splendidly unhappy, than the brutes which perish? It has been well said by the ancients, that man without the fear of God, as he is the most crafty and powerful, so is he the most dangerous and cruel of all wild beasts.

And, to all this sin and wickedness, add all the miseries to which our nature is liable; and take away the hope of a better life, and a directing Providence; and you will conceive the wretched state to which Adam had reduced mankind. Terrible triumph of death and Satan:

—bitter ravage among the noblest works of God! How has one moment defeated all the merciful intentions of Heaven, and humbled millions of glorious immortal creatures, to a situation worse and more miserable than that of their servants, the beasts of the field! Who shall stand in the gap, or stay the anger of an offended God? What sacrifice for sin shall satisfy the debt, which human nature has incurred; and deliver those from death whom the awful word of God had sentenced? To men this had been impossible; but all things are possible with God and with His Son. Though the word had gone forth; and by that word we needs must die; yet was the Son of God enabled to preserve our souls from destruction; and raise in time our bodies again from the grave; when all, who follow His steps on earth, and trust in His name for entrance into Heaven, shall live and reign with Him to all eternity.

This second covenant is called the covenant of grace; in which word, however some may use it, there is no mysterious meaning; it only signifies a free gift, or what we express by the name of *favour*, which we indeed receive most largely by the merits and mediation of our Blessed Saviour. For, besides, that it was an act of free grace to a fallen world, the privileges, enjoyed by us, are far greater than even those of Paradise. By the first a single transgression incurred the

pain of death ;—“ do this,” was its language, “ be obedient and live for ever ; but be wary,— for a single breach of duty, a single offence, has death for its punishment ; death without hope, or remission.”

But Jesus Christ, on the other hand, assures the penitent of forgiveness ; and to enable us to keep His righteous and easy laws, He gives us His Holy Spirit, His example, and His prayers, interceding for our pardon at the throne of the Father. When such are the privileges of the Gospel, how, as St. Paul observes, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ? God forbid, that I should conceal, that there are terrors, as well as comforts, in the resurrection thus purchased by the blood of Christ. If the single act of disobedience were punished by certain death ; what must be their punishment, for whom Christ’s blood is shed in vain ; who despise His example, and His doctrines ; and flatter themselves, that, by an outward reverence, or no reverence at all, so they do but sometimes think highly of His merits and sacrifice, they shall accompany Him into the most Holy place of God ? For such, there is appointed a place of darkness, of weeping, and of gnashing of teeth. Though all are raised, good and bad, and the victory of our Lord is complete ; though He receives the kingdom over death and hell, yet are those His enemies—who would not, that He

should reign over them, who would not obey Him, or follow His laws, yet are they—condemned to a second and more grievous death.

Think what we will, believe what we may, nothing unclean or impenitent can enter into the kingdom of God. “Without,” saith the Spirit, “without, are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whatsoever loveth, or maketh, a lie.”¹

Judge, then, yourselves, brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord. Repent you truly of your sins past; and call on Christ for pardon and for grace to amend your lives. For remember, without a sincere amendment, His pardon cannot be pleaded. The gifts of God must not be used in idleness. The garden itself of Eden was to be tilled; and though our salvation, through Christ, is a free and unbought favour, those only, who sow in righteousness, can expect to reap in mercy.

¹ Rev. xxii. 15.

SERMON XVI.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

ST. MATTHEW, xv. 28.

O woman, great is thy faith : be it unto thee even as thou wilt.

IN reading or hearing the history, from whence these words are taken, and which the Church has chosen for this morning's Gospel, it is probable, and indeed only natural, that many of you should be surprised, not only at the deep faith and interesting humility of this poor Canaanitish woman ; but, also, at the unusual and remarkable sternness assumed on this occasion by our Lord ; His outward indifference to her distress and cries ; and, above all, the sharp and scornful answers, which He returned to her humble entreaties. These difficulties I will now endeavour to explain.

First, then, we may be sure that Christ was, from the first, desirous to relieve her ; we know, for we know how much He loved mankind, that He could not be indifferent to the tears of any one of those millions, whom He was born to heal

and instruct ; and whom He died in torture to redeem. We may be sure, that this seeming coldness was intended to produce some advantage to His petitioner herself, or to His hearers : and that He, who was Wisdom and Love, had none of His actions insignificant or un instructive. More particularly, we may be convinced, that those parts of His history, which the Holy Spirit has thought fit to reveal in Scripture, contain in themselves some meaning of consequence, some valuable lesson, which may confirm or improve the faith and practice of every Christian.

And we may find, in the answer of our Lord Himself, some guide to this hidden meaning ; when He says, “ I am not sent, save to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.” That the Jews might have not even the smallest shadow of occasion of murmuring against Providence, or of envy against the Gentiles, the offer of the Gospel was first made to them. The seventy disciples were commanded to preach to their own countrymen only ; and, except in the casual instance of the woman of Samaria, our Lord confined His doctrine, and in a great measure His miracles, to the Jews only. Not, however, that the benefits of the Gospel were to stop with them ;—not that the day-spring from on high was to shine on Jerusalem only ; but that the ministers of the circumcision, the holy nation, whom God had chosen to put His name among

them, were to be the teachers of this new faith to all the world, and the countrymen, and the earthly friends, of the long expected Saviour.

It was, therefore, for the sake of all the world, that the Jews were first to be grounded in the faith ; and that they, to whose care the ancient prophecies were given, should first bear witness to their fulfilment. Accordingly, though the chief men of the nation rejected Christ ; yet the apostles and first teachers of Christianity were all chosen from among the Jews ; and were sent out as most properly qualified to teach to every nation the whole system of that religion, of the course of which, from the beginning of the world, their forefathers had preserved the testimony ; and the complete fulfilment of which they themselves had seen, and heard, and handled, in the birth, the preaching, the death, and resurrection of the Messiah.

The Jews, however,—even those who believed in Christ as the apostles did,—were very slow in receiving, or understanding, this sort of privilege ; and were too apt, for many years, even after Christ's death, and after St. Paul's preaching, to consider all nations, but their own, as unclean and unholy. We know with what unwillingness they were weaned from the law of Moses ; that even St. Peter required a particular revelation of the Divine will, to induce him to baptize the Roman Cornelius ; and that this

same great apostle was afterwards led to dissemble, and withdraw himself, for a time, from the communion of the Gentile Christians; and it was, I apprehend, in consideration of this weakness of His Jewish disciples, that our Lord conceals, at first, His gracious intentions in favour of the Canaanitish woman. He lends Himself, we find, to their prejudices; He draws out, by neglect and harsh answers, her tears and her sufferings; till the disciples themselves were moved; and He allows even a disciple to plead for her in vain; till the display of this poor heathen's humility was complete and triumphant; and till every Jew around was forced to confess that, heathen as she was, her faith might shame that of many an Israelite.

These Canaanites, it must be observed, were descendants of that wicked nation, which God had, some thousand years before, given up to destruction; with whom the tribes of Israel were to have no league, no peace, no communication or connexion in marriage or friendship; who were to be rooted out before their face, or were to remain,—such of them as did remain,—as thorns in the side, and snares in the path, of the chosen people, to prove by temptation their faith in the promises of God, and their steadiness in the true religion. Of this remnant of idolaters, this accursed nation as they were generally called, was the woman who now addressed

our Lord. And though, by her addressing him as "Lord, thou Son of David," it should seem, that she had better notions of religion, than most of the Gentiles ; yet, if Jesus had at once consented to work a miracle, in behalf of one, whose nation was held accursed in the law of Moses, it is probable, that, both the Jewish nation, and His own disciples, would have accused Him of inconsistent conduct, and of a disregard to the privileges and blessings bestowed by the Almighty on the house of Jacob. He, therefore, knowing the heart, replies in the language which they themselves would have used : " I am not sent, but to the lost sheep of the House of Israel."

It is probable, that, in this distinction paid to their nation, all His hearers agreed ; and praised, in their own proud heart, the wisdom, which divided the chosen people from those who were common and unclean. Even when the hard hearts of the Israelites were a little softened by the woman's persevering entreaties, how cold, how haughty is their intercession in her favour !—It is not, " Lord, thou seest her sorrows ; shut not Thine ears to her prayer : " but it is for their own sake, not for hers, they ask a miracle ; it is not to comfort the mourner they are anxious ; but to relieve themselves from her troublesome importunity :—" Send her away ; for she crieth after us."—But our Saviour would not yet send her away. He designed to instruct His disciples,

as well as to relieve His petitioner; and perceiving, from their manner of asking His mercy, that their hearts were still full of prejudice; He lends Himself yet a little to their way of thinking, and replies with a seeming unkindness, even beyond their own:—"It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to give it to the dogs." Alas! is this the promised Saviour, this the wisest and most merciful of all beings? Can He behold, without compassion, a miserable woman, broken-hearted with the sufferings of a beloved child, embracing His knees, and imploring, with strong crying and tears, the help of Him who only was able to save; and is her prayer to be not only denied, but insulted?—Such, we may be sure, were the thoughts of the Israelites who stood by; and such too were the thoughts which our Saviour, by this seeming cruelty to the miserable object before them, intended to excite in their minds. For the pain, which they felt from witnessing her sufferings, must have made them confess and feel, what our Saviour had often taught them; that, whatever the difference of language, or laws, or religion, whoever wanted their help was their neighbour. But when they heard her wise, her humble, her heroic answer, when, not caring for the scorn cast on her nation, she still pursues the recovery of her daughter's reason; still bends before Him, who chastened her; and in whom she yet trusted, that He

would deliver her ; and when she stoops so low as to beg for crumbs from the table of infinite mercy, there is no doubt, that every one was led to feel, that she had well earned a miracle ; and to cry out with our Lord, “ O woman, great is thy faith ! be it unto thee, even as thou wilt ! ”

The first lesson, then, which our Lord thus practically taught to His disciples, was the same as that contained in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the lesson of universal good-will. And, secondly, it taught them, that if they themselves had pitied this woman's sufferings, if they themselves had interceded with their master in behalf of a Canaanite afflicted with a devil, then with how ill a grace could they oppose the preaching of the Gospel to the Heathen, and thus discovering to whole nations, suffering under Satan's power, those divine truths, which would give them strength to shake off his intolerable burthen ; to break his bonds asunder ; and cast away his cords from them. And, in the present instance, the triumphant faith of a heathen was a full and certain proof that among those condemned and ignorant nations, there were some who were not unworthy vessels to receive the grace of God ; some, who from the north and the south, and countries the most savage and the most remote, should come at the last day, and sit down, in the Kingdom of God, with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

Another instruction to be drawn from this affecting history, and which concerned, not only the apostles, and their countrymen, in that day, but us, and all the world, is what is best expressed in the words of Scripture, “that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”¹ We must not grow slack in our prayers, because we are not immediately heard; nor imagine, that God has abandoned us, because, for some wise reason, He bear long with our entreaties. We see in this history, as well as in the parable of the door, the sleeping friend, and the unjust judge, — we see, how those, whom He had determined to deliver, He still allows to ask; and to ask, for some time, in vain: He still repels their entreaties with outward coldness; and seems, at times, to hide His face, even from those whom He loves most tenderly. But, we also find, that these trials of their faith and patience are not mere idle or capricious experiments, — how far that patience, and that faith, will extend. This He knows already; and need not be informed of further: for He knows the hearts of men; and it is not, my friends, be very well persuaded, it is not out of curiosity He tries them; but out of kindness. If this Canaanite had received, at first, a gracious answer, an awful lesson would have been lost to the disciples;

¹ St. Luke, xviii. 1.

and the woman herself would have wanted that reward, which her patience, thus exercised, might claim; that renown, which has spread her story through every nation, where this Gospel is preached; and that praise, which her faith received from the lips of her Almighty Redeemer.

And so it is, and for such reasons, that God afflicts and tries the faith of Christians; for not only are faith and goodness strengthened and improved by frequent combats with sin, or with difficulty; not only are we all made more perfect by such exercises; even as the soldier, experienced in war, is superior to an unpractised recruit; but our faith and virtue, thus displayed, are an example and instruction to other men; and the trials, by which we are strengthened, are patterns of improvement to our neighbours.

Whatever blessings, then, you implore from the Throne of mercy, or from whatever evils you desire to be delivered, remember to pray, as earnestly, and as patiently, and as humbly, as this poor Canaanite. Though God should seem to hide His face, yet be not daunted; yet faint not under sorrow; but, as Christ Himself did, — in your agony, pray more earnestly. Though He suffer you long to entreat in vain, remember still, that He is faithful, who hath promised—that “he, that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”¹ And, above all, remember,

¹ St. Matt. xxiv. 13.

that, if you stop, you are undone! Your prayers are not yet granted; but, if you cease to pray, they never will be granted. If the Canaanitish woman had gone away in despair at the first or second refusal, what would have become of her daughter? And are the favours, for which a Christian ought to ask, so light and trifling, as not to be worth a little perseverance, a little patient abiding in prayer? Is not Heaven worth, at least, our repeated entreaty? or shall we not ask, as long, and as patiently, as this poor heathen did, — to be freed ourselves, our children, and families, from the power and punishment of devils? Oh, by all your hopes and fears, be not so soon weary of the means of Salvation afforded you! Abandon not rashly that everlasting chain of prayer, which joins the soul to its Maker; that meditation of Divine things, by which, as by Jacob's visionary ladder, our spirits even now climb up to God; and by which, ere long, we may, by the grace of Jesus Christ, enter into the presence of our Lord; and hear from the lips of wisdom, that praise, to which all earthly fame is folly, — “Great is thy faith! be it unto thee, even as thou wilt!”

SERMON XVII.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

ST. LUKE, xi. 27, 28.

And it came to pass, as He spake these things, a certain woman of the company 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.

IT was an honest and natural feeling of the woman, mentioned in this history, which led her, (while wondering at the gracious words which came from the mouth of Christ, and experiencing within herself, their power to make her wise unto salvation) which led her, I say, to consider the distinguished honour and happiness of that Holy Virgin who had brought so perfect and pure a Being into the world; who had held, in her arms and to her motherly breast, the hope and restorer of a lost creation; who had watched the early wisdom and the lisped prayer of Him, who, for our sake, became a child; and whom the King of Glory was, in His earthly nature, not ashamed to reverence by the name of mother.

Blessed, indeed, among women, and, above all women, highly favoured, was Mary the daughter of David; in whose womb the Son of God did not abhor to make His habitation bodily,—whose Seed was ordained to triumph over death and hell, and to bruise for evermore the head of that infernal serpent by whom the first created woman had been deceived. Blessed and highly favoured, the angel declared her to be; when he brought to her the salutation of God Most High: blessed has she since been worthily called among all generations of the faithful; and blessed in the fruit of her womb are all the nations of mankind, who, with her, and like her, have been taught to build their hopes of salvation on the merits of her Saviour, and ours.

It was a deep sense of that honour and blessedness, which led the Roman Catholics into a great and dangerous error; insomuch that they are accustomed to offer prayers, and burn frankincense, to the Virgin Mary, and before her image; to call on her to be their mediator with Christ, even as Christ is their mediator with God the Father; to address her, as “queen of Heaven;” as “star of the sea;” and with many other titles taken from the old idolatry of the heathen; and even, in some of their addresses, to speak of her as the creatress of the world, and to implore her to shew herself a mother by commanding her Son in their behalf.

Of the manner, in which this strange and grievous superstition crept into the world, it is needless, at present, to inform you. It is enough to observe, that all such prayers and such extravagant praises are nothing less than idolatry, and most offensive both to God and his Son : that, highly as the Virgin Mary was honoured among women, she was a woman still ; and, in some respects, a weak and sinful one ; that her Son and Saviour is recorded in the Gospel to have had, twice, occasion to reprove her ; once, at the marriage feast in Cana, for her unreasonable forwardness in urging Him to perform a miracle ; and again, when, together with His brethren, she sought to lay hands on Him as a lunatic. It may be added, that, in no recorded expression of Christ's, not even when, at the time of His own crucifixion, He was recommending His mother to the care and duty of St. John, has He ever so much as hinted, that her prayers were of more value in His sight, than the prayers of any other believer ; and that He has, in two instances, taken care to guard against such an error on the part of His followers, first, when He declared, that whosoever heard and obeyed His preaching was no less dear to Him than His mother, sister, and brother ; and, secondly, when, as you have heard in the text, without denying the fact of His mother's blessedness, He places on a still higher level of happiness and favour, those

Christians, whoever they might be, who received His words with an attentive mind ; and shewed forth their faith in their behaviour. “ Blessed,” said a certain woman in the company, “ Blessed is the womb that bare Thee and the paps which Thou hast sucked !” “ Yea, rather, blessed,” was our Lord’s reply,—“ Yea, rather, blessed are they, that hear the word of God, and keep it !”

The first and leading truth, then, which may be learned from the words, which have been read to you, is the nature and degree of that reverence, which a Christian should pay to the memory of our Saviour’s mother ; and the dangerous error of those, who either regard her as more than woman ; or who believing her to be a woman, yet pay her such a worship as no woman may—as no created being ought to—receive from Christians. And, secondly, for as much as our Lord does not deny the truth of that, which had been said, namely, that His Mother was, indeed, most happy and glorious in the fruit of her womb ; and in having given suck to the desire of nations ; we may be led to consider the honour and happiness, (far less, indeed, than belonged to the Virgin Mary, yet great in themselves, and worthy of all desire and thankfulness,) which are enjoyed, under all circumstances, by the parents of good and virtuous children. I do not, only, mean that it is from such, as these only, that

they are secure of receiving consistent and affectionate regard, and duty, and comfort ; that from the good principles inculcated in their families, and from good principles only, they are to look for obedience and thankfulness in youth, and maintenance, when they themselves are, from age and weakness, in their turn, become dependant on the kindness and care of those whose childish years they had laboured to support and educate :—I do not mean to dwell on the happiness of being beloved by those, to whom we have given life ; nursed by those, whose weakness we have borne with ; fed by those, whom we have toiled to feed ; and comforted, in the hour of death, by the tenderness and prayers of those, whom our instructions and examples have trained in the way of godliness. Nor will I shock you with those bitter sorrows, which must wring a parent's heart, when they, from whom they naturally look for love, are unkind, unthankful, or undutiful. I will not paint to you the dismal and desolate condition of those, who are, in their old age or sickness, deserted, or despised, by the fruits of their own bowels ; though I must again remind you, that, without a religious principle, mere natural affection is by far too weak and uncertain a foundation, to build on it our hopes of receiving from our families the love and duty, which they owe us. But, setting this aside, it is a truth, of which nature and reason make us

sensible, that a wise child is, as it were, a crown to his parents; and that there is scarcely any greater happiness to be on earth enjoyed, or expected, than that of hearing from our neighbours the praises, the deserved praises, of those, to whom we have given life; and whose virtues are, therefore, in a certain sense, our own. “Let the name of Morni be forgotten among the people,” was the saying of a warrior of antient times, when his favourite son had received for his bravery the applause of his king and country, “Let the name of Morni be forgotten,—let it be only said of me,—behold the father of Gaul!” He was content, that his own exploits should be spoken of no more; so that those of his son might be held in honour; and that he himself should be distinguished, as the father of so great virtues. And, doubtless, there are few parents, who receive so much, or so pure pleasure, from commendations bestowed on themselves; as from those, which are given to a wise, or brave, or honest, or industrious son; or to a modest, and dutiful daughter.

And hence a very useful and necessary lesson may be learned, both by parents, and by their children; inasmuch as the former may be taught betimes to bestow such an education on their little ones, and to shew them such examples, as are likely, by God’s grace, to make them grow up a comfort to their family: while the latter may be

led seriously to consider, how great distress and misery of mind their wildness and follies occasion to those, who have given them life ; and whom, if they desire that their own days should be long, they are bound to love and honour. My young friends, [for, in what I am now saying, it is you, who are most concerned,] my young friends, I need not, I trust I need not ask you, whether you love your father and your mother ; whether you really desire to be a comfort and blessing to their age ; and to make them some amends for the pain, the toil, the anxiety, and self-denial, which your birth, and bringing up, have cost them ? Remember, then, that it is by your soberness, your diligence, your chastity, and godliness, that your parents are most honoured before men and angels ; that every unworthy act of yours goes to the heart of those who gave you birth : and that Hell will be more bitter to them ; and the happiness of Heaven itself, imperfect ; if they find you with them in Hell, or are without you in Heaven. Be such, then, as they desire you to be ; — yea rather be such as you ought to be ; and as God commands, and enables you to become ; and your parents shall bless your name in the life which now is ; and rejoice over you in the day of judgement.

Nor is it only to parents and their children that the instruction of my text is valuable. They, who have lost their parents, and they to whom

the blessing is denied —of seeing their children grow up in godliness, and, like the Son of God, in wisdom as well as in stature,—these too may learn the bountiful loving kindness, which hath laid up for those, who serve Him truly, a better name than sons or daughters ; when He has promised to be Himself a brother and a son to those who do the will of His Heavenly Father ; and has declared, that not even His own mother was so blessed in the fruit of her womb, as those humble believers shall one day be in Him, who have, in this life, heard and kept the words of His Gospel.

Our nature itself, and our natural experience, have taught us, how great is the happiness of a mother when her pains are over ; and “ she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.”¹ We have only to look around to learn the delight and interest, with which the same mother watches the growth of her child ; partakes its sports ; and witnesses its improvement. I have already shortly touched on the happiness, which the virtues, and success, and honour, of a son bestow on his parents. And I need not say, that, in all these particulars, the lot of Mary, the mother of Jesus, was more blessed than all women who have brought forth from the womb. Yet greater and purer and

¹ St. John, xvi. 21.

more intense and more perfect than this, the happiness of Heaven shall be : and the humblest and poorest Christian shall have more joy and comfort there, than this, the greatest joy, of which, in the present life, our human nature is capable. I have heard it made the subject of complaint by some, that we can have no idea of Heaven ; and that the prospect of its enjoyment has the less hold on our minds, because we cannot picture to ourselves wherein that enjoyment consists. But to such as these it may be answered, that, though we cannot exactly say, wherein it *consists* ; yet Christ Himself has taught us what it *exceeds* ; and to a mother who has shed tears of love and happiness over her infant, it will be sufficient praise of Heaven, to know that its blessedness is far greater than the greatest which she has felt on such an occasion. Blessed, yea blessed is she, even in this world of sin and danger, who rejoiceth over the fruit which God has given her ; blessed still more, above all the daughters of Eve, was Mary the mother of the Lord Jesus,—but blessed, beyond even the blessedness of Mary in this life, shall be those, whom, in the life to come, the Lord of Glory shall invite to enter into His joy !

Lastly, I cannot conclude my consideration of the present text, without calling your serious attention to the terms, on which this wonderful

promise is made by Christ; and to the description of persons who are interested in it. “Blessed,” said our Lord, “are they, who hear the word of God and keep it.” “To hear the word of any one,” is an expression common in Scripture—for becoming his disciple or scholar; for learning and receiving, with a faithful and attentive mind, the doctrine which he teaches, and the commandments which he lays down. And to keep the word thus heard, and to receive it, means both to bear it in mind, during our after life, and to use it as a rule of behaviour; to remember and to obey it. It follows, therefore, that the persons, whose blessedness is thus magnified, must both have believed in the Lord, (since otherwise their hearing would be but vain,) and have obeyed His commandment; since to remember without obeying could only have increased their damnation. And here, as in every part of Scripture, the perfect union may be seen between faith and good works; inasmuch as without both of them, we can have no reason to look for the blessedness held out in the Gospel. The truth is, the one is a necessary reason and motive for the other; but it is for the sake of that other that so much stress is laid on it in the Scriptures. Faith is the foundation; good works, the building: the house cannot be laid without its foundation; but a foundation, with-

out a house built on it, will be a miserable shelter indeed from the storm of God's wrath, and the thunders of the day of judgement.

We have learned, then, from the text, which I have laid before you, first, the due degree of honour, to which the Virgin Mary is entitled from Christians. Secondly, the obligation, which lies on parents, to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord; and on children, so to live as to be a comfort and honour to their parents. Thirdly, I have given you some light to judge of the blessedness of Heaven as prepared for the children of God. And fourthly, which is, of all others, the most important lesson, that it is by hearing and doing the will of Christ, by attendance on the preaching of His Gospel, by the study of His Scriptures, and by the diligent practice of all which we find written there, that, only we can hope to share in that general and most merciful pardon of sins, and admission into life eternal, which the blood of Christ has bought for us; and for which the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost is busied in our hearts to prepare us. And what yet remains but an earnest desire after these glories held out to our view, a stedfast resolution to seek after them by the appointed paths of duty and service, and by daily and nightly prayer to God, so to guide our hearts and hands, as that we may not be found

among those who have heard His word in vain ;
but of their number, who, having brought
forth fruit with patience, He Himself, in the
day of His power, will condescend to call Most
Blessed !

SERMON XVIII.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

ST. JOHN, vi. 12.

Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

THE miracle, which is recorded in the Gospel of to-day, in itself requires no explanation or commentary. It is evident to the common sense of you all, that no power, but the power of God, could have multiplied five loaves and two fishes into a sufficient meal for five thousand hungry people : and it is equally plain, that no art, or juggling, of men, or of evil spirits, could have imposed on the eyes, and feelings, of so many witnesses. No enthusiasm, or power of fancy, could have made them believe that their hunger had been satisfied by a comfortable repast, when their wants and sufferings would cry out so loudly to the contrary : and supposing that our Lord and His apostles had been prepared beforehand with a stock of provisions, a supposition which their well known poverty renders quite impossible, it would be still more absurd to ima-

gine, that so great a store could be carried in a basket by a single little boy. We must, then, be sure, admitting the authenticity of the Gospel history, of which I have, I hope, on former occasions, convinced you, we must be sure, that the miracle was real; that it was far above all power of men, or of evil spirits, or any power, but of His, who had, of old time, created the world; and now, by a similar display of divinity, provided flesh in the wilderness for His people.

But, though the miracle itself requires no commentary, yet are there many practical truths to be derived from it, which are well worth the serious consideration of us all; and which I will, therefore, shortly mention, leaving to the private meditations of each of you, the improvement and application of the hints afforded in this place. For without such private meditation of the Scriptures, which are read and explained to you in church,—without some attempts to recollect and set in order in your memory the doctrines preached by us, these doctrines, I fear, can hardly be expected to profit you, either in this world, or in the world to come. The real way to turn to good account the lessons afforded us in the Bible, or from the pulpit, is to think them over again in private;—to ask ourselves, first, how we should have acted under the circumstances of Christ's followers; and, then, to consider seriously if there be not, in truth,

more points of likeness between their situation and ours, than a common observer would, at first, suppose.

Thus, my friends, to make the present case our own ;— the Galileans, whose miraculous relief has been this day read to you, had followed Christ into a wilderness, to hear the words of the Gospel ; by so doing they had given a great and striking instance of their regard for Him, and of their confidence in Him ; and there is none here, I apprehend, who will not readily say in his heart, that, had he been then alive, he would have gladly imitated their example. Alas, my friends, while we compare our daily conduct with theirs, on that occasion, what reason have we for concluding thus favourably of what our conduct would then have been ? These men had borne the heat of the sun, and the labour and risk of the journey :—divers of them came from far ; they had followed Christ into a barren place, for His sake, and for the Gospel's ; and it was morally impossible, that any of them could know, or guess the means, by which He intended to relieve them : since, from the time of Moses, had it not been known, that so great a multitude had been nourished in those burning and barren sands, so barren that the fact of there being grass in the desert is mentioned as a remarkable circumstance. What relief they were to expect ; what hope of being preserved from starving ; they could not

know : but this they knew and felt, that they were busy in the care of their souls ; and in the performance of their duty : they knew, that God was with them ; and the Messiah at their head : that where He was, there was mighty deliverance ; and that the power of God, while it instructed their souls, would never let their bodies perish. And so confident were they in this holy hope, so patient during the long discourse of Christ, that we see them abiding resolutely in that one barren spot, till, if they attempted to return home, the greater part of them must have fainted and fallen down to perish by the way, a food for the wolf, the jackal, and the hyæna. And can we, dare we — without blushing — compare our own slackness with such resolute devotion as theirs ? How often has a little press of business either shortened our private prayers ; or induced us to forget them entirely : how many acts of piety or goodness, how many beginnings and blossoms of repentance, have we laid aside for a future season, for fear of some inconvenience, not the twentieth part so formidable as that which these men encountered to hear a single sermon of the Messiah ? Many of them, it appears, came from far, — so far that they would have been exhausted in endeavouring to return, empty ; yet how often is the distance of a single mile urged as an excuse for neglecting our public prayers to this same Saviour whom we profess to honour, and for turning our

backs on the Sacrament of His body and blood. How often are business, and the cares of a family, urged as an excuse for living in a total disregard of all religious duties : yet do we suppose—of these five thousand persons, there were not many, who had also wives and children dependant on them for support; many, whose trade or labour must have stood still, while they were attending on the wanderings of our Saviour? O my friends, while such is our conduct in the usual affairs of life, I greatly fear that, in more urgent trials, neither our faith, nor our courage would have been very conspicuous. We, who seek so slight excuses to absolve us from our duty now, would then no doubt have found out many reasons for staying at home with the great body of our nation; laughing perhaps at the easy simplicity of the poor enthusiasts, who followed their Lord into the wilderness.

“ But, circumstances,” it will be said, “ are widely different; now there is no Christ on earth, whose doctrine we should hear;—and there are no hopes of miracles to feed us. Now the time is past, in which Christians were to have neither purse nor scrip; and in which the morrow was to take care for the things belonging to itself; now we are arrived in days, when we are not only allowed, but commanded, to be careful, to labour, and to provide for ourselves and families; where he, that careth not for his own, is said, in Scripture,

to be worse than an infidel ; and when he, who will not work, is, by the same authority, threatened with having nothing to eat." Now, this is all exactly true : but it is also true, that the duties, which a Christian is now called upon to attend, need, in no single instance, interfere with the regular cares, and maintenance, of a family. We are not now required, or called upon, to run into deserts ; or to give up our lawful callings : but we are required, while we labour for the meat which perisheth, not to forget that bread, which cometh down from Heaven. But if our pride, or our covetousness, require a greater share of the good things of this world, than we can lawfully obtain ; or if our idleness on the six days, in which a man should work, obliges us to break the Sabbath ; it can be no excuse for one sin, that it had its beginning in another.

In one respect, however, every Christian is placed in a parallel situation with the band of believers in the wilderness. To each, and all of us, the word of our calling is addressed, which bids us forsake the world, and the multitude of them, which do evil ; and to tread, with Christ for our leader, the rugged and desolate paths of repentance. We are to brave, with Him, the scorn and laughter of the sinful remainder of mankind ; and, where the pursuits and pleasures of the world interfere with the high calling, which is set before us, we are to account the

world but dross ; so that we may save our own souls. And we, like these hearers of Christ in the desert, may, while we follow His commands, and do not, from vain glory, or from idle superstition, court to ourselves unnecessary difficulties ;—we too, may hope, while we seek after the bread, which came down from Heaven, that the goodness of Him, who knoweth our necessities, will supply us with a sufficient portion of the food which perisheth. While we are anxious for our souls, God has Himself promised, that our frail bodies shall not be forgotten. He, it is true, no longer visibly multiplies our loaves ; or feeds us, from His own Hands, with the bread of blessing : but the secret springs of Providence are still at His disposal ; and, by ways which we cannot see, and sources, which, if we saw, we could not understand ; He still has not forgotten to give to the fowls their food ; and to feed the young ravens, which call upon Him. “ Seek ye first,” saith Christ, “ the kingdom of God and His righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

A trust in God, then, and a devotion to His service, is the first and most important consideration, which arises from the miracle of the loaves and fishes. Nor, my friends, can this lesson be considered as otherwise than applicable to the circumstances of life, in which, by far the greater number of those, who hear me, have been placed

by the wisdom of Providence. To most of you, the world is, indeed, a desert place; and, with all the blessings (and God forbid, I should be insensible to them) which as fathers, as husbands, as freemen, as Englishmen, and, far above all, as Christians, you enjoy, you may be said, without any unreasonable murmuring, to inherit in this life, your full proportion of toil for the day, and of anxiety for the morrow. The times have been in the memory of us all; when the father, looking on his wife and children, has asked his heart, with a more than fatherly anxiety;—“whence may we get bread that these may eat?” and when the earth, even according to the letter, has been to us all a land of barrenness.—And, though the blessing of the Almighty has crowned the past year with His goodness; and, though those evil days of famine have been now far removed from our doors; yet is there, in the world, sufficient distress of nations, with perplexity,—to make the hearts of the boldest among our number fail for fear; if it were not, that we place our trust in the Lord, in whose hands are Heaven and earth.

But there is, also a second lesson, of great importance, which may be learnt, from the history of the loaves and fishes. When our Saviour bade His disciples give up to the hunger of the multitude their own scanty stock of provisions,—a stock so scanty, that, as I have observed before,

the wildest dreams of an enthusiast could never fancy such a supply equal to the wants of so many, do we find them hesitating, or drawing back, or refusing to contribute the little in their power, because they could do no more? No—when Christ repeats His commands, obedient to His will, and relying on His power, they boldly and generously go on distributing; confident, that He, who gave the command, would also give the power to perform it.

Even so should Christians exert themselves, for the relief of the poor. It is a common excuse of the selfish and uncharitable, that the little, which it is in their power to do, bears so small a proportion to the extent of the mischief, that it is not worth while attempting to do any thing. Now, not to mention, that the commands to do good, and to distribute, are given to every man, according to his ability; and that every man is individually answerable to God, for neglecting His orders;—without any reference to what is done, or not done, by others; not to mention, that they are many small exertions, which produce a great effect; many threads, which make a cable; many grains of sand, which build up a mountain,—let us apply this reasoning to any transaction of common life; and see how it would be received. In a manufactory, where many hundred labourers are employed, would it be any excuse for one of them being

idle, that, among so many, his work would hardly be missed? what wages would such an one receive from his employers?

But, in truth, if we do our best in our station; and commit, in humble faith, the issue of the whole to God; we may be sure, that our exertions, however small, — our alms, however scanty, — (provided we can do no more,) will not be thrown away. I have myself been sometimes astonished, when I have seen, or read, of the mighty good, which has arisen from small beginnings, accompanied by the blessing and favour of the Most High. But in giving our alms, we cannot tell or calculate, — for no one knows, but God, — how much good even a widow's mite may do. A single warm and comfortable meal given to a poor neighbour, in a time of distress, may, by its consequences, be the means of saving a family. It may seem strange; but what if this man were, even then, almost worn out with want and toil, and if such timely nourishment have prevented his falling sick, and preserved him in a capacity to labour; — are not then his own and his family's lives sustained by it? or what, if such a small relief came at a moment, when his heart was growing hard with distress; and when he was tempted to take to bad courses, for support; — may not a soul have been saved for ever, by our means? Oh, it will be a glorious sight, hereafter, when the books of Providence are laid

open before our eyes ; — to see by what secret springs, what humble exertions, what meek and modest charities, the happiness of families, the support of nations, the great machine of the world itself, have been regulated and influenced : — to witness how God's Providence may have given power and energy to the feeble alms of a widow ; or to the silent prayers of those, who had prayers only to bestow ; or how a cup of cold water given in the name of Christ, shall, in no-wise, lose its reward !

Further, we find, in the history of this miracle, that the loaves, which were given to the multitude, were so increased by the blessing of Christ, that the remainder by far exceeded the original stock. And none can have persevered in a steady course of charity themselves ; none can have witnessed it, in others ; without observing, that the favour of Providence does, for the most part, even in the ordinary course of the world, so bless and increase the means of those, who are really charitable, that, as their zeal to do good enlarges, their power enlarges also. We know from the Scripture, how the widow's barrel of meal never wasted, so long as she shared it with Elijah : and I have read, in the life of a very great and good man, written by himself, that, though he had been often in debt and distress before, yet, since he had set aside a certain share of his fortune for the poor, he had never known want ; but though

his expences increased every year, he had been able every year to increase his charity. I will not say, that God always thus increases our power of doing good, in proportion to our will: but there is one way, in which almost every master of a family may, under God's blessing, extend his means of doing good for himself; and that is by the diligent practice of another duty enforced by the history of this miracle. I mean by an accurate attention to lessen his own unnecessary expences, and to prevent all excess or wastefulness in his family. We find, in the conclusion of the history, that even Christ Himself, who had just, with a word, created these provisions, and who had power to command even the stones that they should be made bread; yet did not He think it beneath Him to be anxious for the fragments, which remained from the miraculous meal, in order that nothing might be lost. And can we dare,— we, miserable dependants on His bounty, — can we dare to waste His good creatures, in careless extravagance, or in swinish gluttony? Or can we forget, that we then provoke Him to take away from us those blessings which we use so carelessly?

Oh, let us be wise in time; let us consider what are our best interests, both in time, and in eternity: — and let us, by prudent management in our households, and by avoiding all temptation to luxury, and unnecessary expenditure, so in-

crease our means of doing good to our fellow-creatures, that, the blessing of God attending our charitable endeavours, we may hope at the last great Day to hear those condescending words of our Saviour, “ Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.”¹

¹ St. Matthew, xxv. 40.

SERMON XIX.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

ST. JOHN, viii. 58.

Jesus said unto them, " Before Abraham was, I am."

THESE words are introduced by our Saviour, in the course of that eloquent expostulation with the Jews, which has been read to you in this morning's Gospel ; in which, having assured them, that whosoever should keep His saying should never taste of death, He replies to their objection [that Abraham and the prophets, the best and greatest men of ancient times, had all, in their turns, paid the debt of nature ; and that by this promise of immortality to His followers, He made Himself greater than either Abraham, or Moses,]—He replies, I say, to this objection — by admitting the full force of the principle, on which it was founded ; and by laying claim, in positive terms, to a superiority over both Moses, and Abraham, far greater than that, to which even their cavil had accused him of pretending.

He first begins with a preface very proper to so unusual a claim, as that which He was about to make ;—a denial of all vain-glory, which might have led Him to assume a higher character among men, than that, which His Eternal Father sanctioned. “ If I honour myself,” are His words, “ my honour is nothing. It is my Father, that honoureth me ; of whom ye say, that He is your God. Yet ye have not known Him ; but I know Him ; and if I should say, I know Him not,—I should be a liar like unto you : but I know Him, and keep His sayings.” Then follows the claim, which He makes, of superiority to the great ancestor of the Jews : — “ Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day ; and he saw it, and was glad.”

In these words, He compares, as it should seem, the hardness and coldness of heart, with which the Jews received Him ;—with that glow of rapturous devotion, which Abraham felt towards Him : and hence, two important truths will follow ;—important both to the faith, and to the practical devotions, of a Christian : — First, that Abraham believed in Christ, and hoped in Him as the future Saviour of Abraham himself, and of all mankind ;—that Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed :—and secondly, that Christ Himself had been seen by Abraham, and had, therefore, as Son of God, and Second Person in the Most Glorious Trinity,

existed for ages before the time, when He took the form of man, and was conceived by His Virgin Mother.

The first of these assertions is proved by the rejoicing of Abraham in Christ's day. For why should he rejoice in the expectation of an event, from which no benefit was to be derived to himself, or to so many millions of his posterity? And what benefit could he look to, but that he himself, and his posterity, were to be saved? that they should escape the wrath of God, should be raised from the dead, and made partakers of the Kingdom of Heaven, by that Being, in the hope of whose coming to accomplish these glorious purposes, he, therefore, with good reason, might rejoice with exceeding joy? If Christ, by the merits of His blood, were not to make atonement for the sins of the world, and of Abraham among the rest, of what advantage was His coming to Abraham?—of what advantage to those holy prophets, who, since the world began, spake of His coming; and fell asleep, as we read in Scripture, in the hope of the promises?

There are some pretended Christians, (Unitarians they call themselves,) who maintain, that Christ was nothing more than a man; that He only came to preach a purer doctrine, than had, before His time, been revealed to the world; and that His blood had no more power to wash away the sins of the world, than that of any other

good man, or than that of the bulls and the goats, which were offered on the Jewish altars.

But if this, their comfortless doctrine, were true, what reason had Abraham,—I again demand, what reason had Abraham—for rejoicing? If a new and more perfect revelation were all which Christ was to bring with Him,—that would indeed be a benefit to those, who followed; but, surely, none to those generations, who were already dead in their ignorance. If God had told Abraham,—“you yourself are blind; and your children, and children’s children, after you, for two thousand years to come, shall continue in blindness:—but a Man shall then, at length, arise;—descended from your loins—who shall give sight to many among your offspring; and to many more among those nations, who noways belong to you:”—had this been the promise of God to Abraham, and to his seed, [and between this supposition, and that of the Unitarians, no difference will be found in kind, though the degree of the blindness, and the value of the promised cure, be doubtless very different,] might not the patriarch have reasonably replied, “Wherein am I the better for this promised restorer of sight to the world? To myself, and to the greater part of my descendants, to Sarah, to Isaac, to Ishmael,—those persons for whose welfare I am most solicitous,—these revelations, however valuable they may hereafter be, are

nothing. *Our* eyes are not to be opened: *we* are to receive no light, as to the will of God;—no additional certainty as to the resurrection of the dead: and it is a small comfort, surely, or cause for thankfulness, to be told, that, many ages after us, there will be some more fortunate, more blessed, than ourselves.”

But, if the father of the faithful were told, as it, doubtless, was revealed to him, that the sentence of death, which had been passed on the world, in consequence of Adam’s sin, and of the sins of all Adam’s progeny, should be removed, by a merciful God, for the sake of certain great exertions, and powerful intercession, to be made by His Son, in the latter ages of the world;—that, for the sake of this Blessed Son, the sins of ignorance should be forgiven, and every repented transgression, of whatever kind, overlooked and forgotten;—and that, in these benefits to be then proclaimed to the world, all mankind should, from Adam downwards, be partakers;—we may reasonably understand the gratitude of Abraham, and the overflow of his honest triumph, when told that this mighty deliverer was, according to the flesh, to descend from his own family, and from his own loins. Above all, when he was informed, that this marvellous Redeemer was to be God Himself, made manifest in the flesh;—that the same glorious Being, who had spoken with him in his dreams, and in his waking

visions, should enter into the womb of one of his descendants ; and become, by the mother's side, and in his human nature, the Son, and Seed, of Abraham,—how greatly must he have wondered at the goodness, and lowliness, of his great Redeemer ; and at the honour, which his race, above all others, was to receive, before men, and angels.

That it was, then, REDEMPTION, in which the promise to Abraham consisted ; and which that father of the faithful rejoiced to anticipate ; is apparent from the very greatness of his joy. “ He rejoiced,” saith Christ, “ to see My day.” But this is not all : for Christ, the Son of God, the Second Person in the Trinity, actually appeared to him. “ He saw it, and was glad.” And, here again, the words of Scripture bear a positive argument, [and, unless the father of lies had blinded their hearts, an argument not to be controverted,] against the same pretended Christians ; whom I have already cited. For if Christ, as they maintain, were a mere man, and like other men ; and if, consequently, He had first received the gift of life and being, when He was enclosed in the womb of an earthly female ; what Christ was that, who spake, as we have heard, to the Jews in the temple ? who declared, that Abraham had seen Him ? that he had rejoiced to see His day ? For that these two expressions were understood by the Jews, as bearing

the same meaning,—that to see Christ, and to see His day, was regarded as one and the same thing—is plain from the answer, which they made to Him. “Thou,” say they, “Thou art not yet fifty years old; and hast Thou seen Abraham?” And, as it is plain, how they understood this speech; so, it is no less so, how our blessed Saviour meant that they should understand it:—since He still more clearly explains himself in the following verse, where He says, “Before Abraham was,—I AM.”

In these words, it is evident, that He not only asserts His own pre-existence to Abraham;—not only does He declare to those, who have ears to hear, that He was the Christ, the Word of God, the Messenger of the Covenant, who was before all things;—but He lays claim, in unequivocal language, to the dreadful and incommunicable name of God, of Jehovah:—He describes Himself, not only as one, who had existed before Abraham; who might have, at some time, begun to exist; and might, since, have ceased to do so; but He uses an expression, which, if it have any meaning at all, can only refer to eternal duration. “Before Abraham was, I AM!” As if He had said, “I have never begun to exist; with Me is neither past nor future; a thousand years to come are but, in My sight, as yesterday,—a thousand years, that are gone by, are the same with to-day or to-mor-

row. Time, and its courses, apply not to Him, who is unchangeable: with Me, is an everlasting *now*:—and the years, and ages, of man are nothing, in respect of Me.” Can this consist with a finite, a created being? Let those, if any such there are, who still hesitate respecting the meaning of Christ, and the manner, in which the Jews understood that meaning;—let those, I say, recollect the name, by which the Almighty had, in the time of Moses, revealed Himself to the children of Israel;—and the manner, in which the infidel Jews received this declaration of our Saviour. When Moses asked, in whose name he should bear the message of the Eternal to His people: “I AM THAT I AM,” said Jehovah: and again, “thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, ‘I AM’ hath sent me unto you.”¹ “Before Abraham was, I AM” was the parallel expression of Christ: and that the Jews understood the declaration, as we should understand it, is evident from what follows;—that “they took up stones to stone Him,” for this supposed blasphemy: and because, as we are assured in another place, they considered Him, in this declaration, as making Himself equal with God. But, supposing them mistaken, why did not Christ, the preacher of truth, observing their mistake, correct it? Why did He not assure

¹ Exodus, iii. 14.

them, that, by declaring that Abraham had seen His day, He meant merely, that Abraham had only heard of it, as a thing likely to happen?—that when He declared,—to use His own words,—“before Abraham was, I AM,” He only signified, that, before Abraham was born, God had contemplated, in His infinite foresight, the birth of Jesus (and why of Jesus, in that case,—more than that of Pilate, or of Iscariot?)

If this were His only meaning; why not explain Himself to His countrymen? why suffer them to be led astray,—with so natural an error,—by His silence, and by the miracle which followed? For, when they took up stones,—to cast at him; and when—(as in the passage, which concludes the Gospel, which you have heard to-day, and which immediately follows my text,) we find, that “He *hid* Himself” from them, we may understand it as the Greek word, which is there used, signifies, according to the most learned men, “that He made use of one of the most usual actions of a supernatural being—viz. that He vanished, or disappeared, from their eyes.”

And that this is the true meaning, is clear from the circumstances of the story; and from the place, in which those circumstances occurred. For, where was our Lord, at the time of this conversation? In the temple, a vast square court like a market place; crowded with people, who were

anxious to put Him to death ; and surrounded with a lofty stone wall and chambers wherein the priests only, the enemies of Jesus, were allowed to enter. Whither, under such circumstances, could a supposed blasphemer flee? and how could he conceal himself from the rage of the bigotted crowd, but by making, as He had done of old when He descended on Sinai,—“ darkness His secret place: His pavilion round about Him were dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies.”¹

And, if we examine further into the circumstances of Abraham’s history, as connected with this declaration of Christ’s, that Abraham had seen Him ; we shall find, indeed, no mention of Christ, in the account given of Abraham in the book of Genesis : but we shall find very frequent mention of the Lord Jehovah, who is also called God, with whom Abraham conversed ; and whom he, on many occasions, saw. Now we know, that, if Scripture be true, and consistent with itself, “ No man hath seen God at any time ;—the only begotten Son, who is of the Father, He hath declared Him.”² And to reconcile these accounts, no way, which I know, has succeeded, but the Catholic faith of the ever blessed Trinity ;—and the persuasion, that, though God, the Father, be invisible, and inaccessible by fleshly eye ; yet has the Son, not only as God’s repre-

¹ Psalm xviii. 11.

² St. John, i. 18.

sentative, but as God Himself, bearing the name of Jehovah Eternal and Almighty, appeared as the Messenger of the Covenant, between the Father and His saints ; as the Teacher of Adam, the Friend of Abraham, the Lawgiver of Moses, the Lord of David, and the lowly Master and Instructor of the twelve poor fishermen of Galilee.—He, by whose agency, the Father made the worlds ; — “ who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God,”¹ He has been content to take upon Himself the form of a servant ; and to humble Himself even unto death, the death of the cross, for us miserable sinners.

On the whole, then, we may conclude from the foregoing passages of Scripture, first, that there is none other salvation appointed for man, save only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ :— and that Abraham, and the holy men of ancient time, hoped for eternal life, through the merits of a future Messiah : even as we look back to the meritorious sacrifice of a Saviour already come.

Secondly, that the Divine Person who is generally called God in Scripture, — with whom Abraham conversed ; and who, accompanied by two angels, humbled Himself to eat, under the shade of his tent ; the same, with whom Moses

¹ Philip. ii. 6.

met in the bush; and with whom that great prophet spake face to face,—that this was not God the Father, but the Second Person of the Trinity, the same Word of God, who was afterwards made flesh, and dwelt among us: and that, therefore, as the New Testament is nothing more than the history of Christ in the flesh, so the Old Testament is a collection of His discoveries of Himself to man, before He vouchsafed to take on Himself our human nature.

Thirdly, that all prayer and praise is due, to Him, in consideration, at once, of His exalted nature, His mighty power, and His infinite goodness: and that we cannot desire a better assurance of Salvation, than the support of Omnipotence itself; and that, on the other hand, we cannot escape a most deserved punishment, if we seek, like those wretched religionists whom I have already mentioned, to lessen the merits of Christ's sacrifice; and, rejecting so great salvation, to look for safety in our own inventions, and in the broken reed of personal merit.

Fourthly, we should recollect, that this blessed Son of God came into the world; not only as the object of our faith, and of our devotion; but, as the model also of our practice;—that He will not admit, from us, a lip-worship, which is unaccompanied with the homage of our heart and lives; and, if we believe, that God came down to dwell among men;—that He took on Himself

the form of a servant, and was obedient to the most disgraceful end of a malefactor ; we should learn hence, to imitate Him, in a real humility and lowliness of temper ; in a carelessness, so far as we are ourselves concerned, of all worldly rank and fortune, and in a perfect submission to the will of Him, the All-Good, the Almighty, the Sovereign, and Benefactor and Father of all.

SERMON XX.

SUNDAY BEFORE EASTER.

ST. LUKE, xxiv. 26.

Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His Glory ?

THE occasion, on which these words were spoken, was as follows : — Two of our Lord's disciples, who had been witnesses of His miracles, His virtues, and His cruel death, were walking sadly together, and communing of the things, which they had heard and seen. Jesus of Nazareth, their Master and instructor, was known to them by long friendship, by love, and by reverence. They had seen His goings out, and comings in ; that all His actions were blameless ; and that His heart breathed only purity and mercy. Of His doctrine, they knew, that never man spake as He did ; of His power, that all things, in earth, and in Heaven, were subject to His tone of authority ; that He was a Prophet mighty in word and in deed. They had seen obstinate diseases cured by Him with a breath :

they had seen His word turn five small loaves into a meal for five thousand people : they had seen the wind and storm obey His commands ; and had beheld His way in the sea, and His path in the deep waters.—Nor was it lifeless nature only, which thus acknowledged His Divinity. The rebellious angels, the first seducers and enemies of men, crouched down and trembled at the feet of Jesus ; whom they hailed, with terror and astonishment, as the Son of God most high. In this character, too, He was acknowledged by His Father Almighty Himself ; who, by a voice from Heaven, and by the visible descent of the Holy Ghost, had declared Himself well pleased in His beloved Son.

With such circumstances as these to raise His character, they had hoped that Jesus was He, who should have redeemed Israel : — that He should have saved His people from their enemies ; and have sate on the throne of His father David, (from whom He was, by His Mother's side, decended,) — the king of Jerusalem, and of all the world. For the Jews, — partly induced by their pride, which made them wish to see all nations at their feet ; partly by those passages in the prophets, which describe Christ's second coming in power and majesty to judge mankind, — had quite overlooked those other prophecies, which said that the Messiah, before He should triumph, should be a Man of sorrow,

and acquainted with grief.¹ They had no idea that their Christ was to suffer on the cross ; but had hoped that He would be a military Messiah, — to make all the nations of the world — slaves to the Jewish people. But this Jesus, of whom such mighty expectations were formed, was a poor young man, a wanderer on the earth, without a home to lay His head.—His greatest triumph was, once, the riding on an ass ; His richest attendants, a few poor simple women ; and the names of madman, of sorcerer, and blasphemer, were all the titles, which He received from His country.

Such was the mournful life of Him, whose birth was proclaimed by angels ; feared by tyrants ; and honoured by the wise men of the farthest east ; but when His sorrowing disciples, in their Sabbath evening's walk to Emmaus, reflected on the dreadful manner, in which that life was brought to an end ; when they remembered all those circumstances of horror and cruelty, which you have heard read to-day ; when they thought on the agony and bloody sweat, the scourging, the bitter and cruel mocking, the crown of thorns, the torments and the lingering death of Him, from whom such great things were hoped ; they might well be lost, in wonder, and in sorrow, that such glorious pros-

¹ Isaiah, liii. 3.

pects should be marred by the sin and folly of mankind. It was, indeed, this crucified God, which was to the Jews a stumbling block ;—the main objection, which the pride of their nation could not surmount ; and, in itself, it is so wonderful, that we well believe it surpassed the comprehension of those ignorant, though well-meaning, Galileans.

As they were thus conversing, a Stranger joined them. Their eyes were holden, that they should not know Him ; but it was no other than Jesus Himself, whom they lamented,—now risen from the dead. He rebukes them, for their slowness of belief ; and He reminds them, that the ancient prophets had all said, that Christ ought to suffer such things ; and then, and not till then, to enter into His glory. Then, beginning with Moses, and the prophets, He expounded, unto them, the things which were written concerning Himself. What were those words which made their hearts to burn within them, we are not told ; but, as the Scriptures, to which He referred, are in the hands of us all, and read in our churches every Sabbath day, it is our own fault, (and a fault, which we cannot expect will be excused,) if we are ignorant of these truths, on which our hopes of eternal salvation are founded. And at present it is peculiarly fitting to prepare our minds for duly observing that day, on which the Son of God laid

down His life for our sakes ; so that we may know and feel how great things God hath done for us, and may experience proportional gratitude and love to Him who hath loved us so truly and so well.

We may learn, then, from Moses and the prophets, that it was necessary for Christ to suffer such things, and to enter into His glory. It was, indeed, according to His own words, the very cause for which He came into the world. Even when His human nature was sinking under that load of God's vengeance, which we should else have suffered ; when, with bitter and strong crying, He called on God who was able to deliver Him ; when His soul was troubled ; and He shrunk almost from His approaching torments ; — even then, though His infirmities almost forced the prayer of—“ Father, save me from this hour ; ” — yet His Divine courage immediately corrects the weakness ; and He remembers, “ that for this cause came I to this hour.”¹ When the zeal of Peter² draws a sword in His defence, He answers, that, if He but asked His Father, He would send many thousand angels to His rescue ; but how then would the Scripture be fulfilled that thus it must be.³ — I will endeavour to explain the testimony thus

¹ St. John, xii. 27.

² St. John, xviii. 10.

³ St. Matthew, xxvi. 53.

borne by Moses and the prophets, and indeed by our own reason and conscience, to Jesus Christ the crucified.

Now, what we learn from the Scriptures, on this subject, consists chiefly of three truths: first, that a Messiah, was necessary;—that it was necessary that a Holy Redeemer should rescue men from sin and death: next, that this Redeemer was to do the will of God in suffering, though guiltless, a painful death, as a sacrifice for all mankind: lastly it follows, that all these things were accomplished in Christ; and in none but Him.

The account, which Moses has given us, of the creation, and the fall of Adam and Eve, is very short; but sufficiently long for our useful instruction. It tells us, that, when the first man and woman were created out of the dust of the earth;—[and liable, no doubt, as we are now, to all the frailties, and decay, and death, which befall other creatures,] God, out of His free mercy placed them in a pleasant garden; where angelic guards defended them from danger; and where the fruit of a certain tree, called the tree of life, had a miraculous power to save them from death and sickness. Deceived, however, by the malice of the Devil, under the form of a serpent, they broke the only command, which God had laid on them; and were sent back from Paradise to till the ground, whence they

were taken ; and to be liable again to all the temptations, to all the wants, afflictions, diseases, and death, natural to their earthly bodies.

And, in this punishment, the goodness of God was apparent ; as well as His justice. It is vain, and wicked, to imagine, that the offence of eating an apple was too slight to merit so dreadful a sentence. Where God had given them freely all the trees in the gardens, all the delights and comforts of the world, and all on one single condition, [namely, that they should refrain from one single tree, out of so many,] was that a little fault, which disobeyed so easy a commandment ? Or was that a too grievous punishment, which sent them back to their original condition ; and deprived them of blessings, which they were no longer able to enjoy ? For when man, weak as he was, had once assumed the privilege of judging and thinking for himself ; when he had once begun his disobedience to his King and Creator ; what would the tree of life have caused,—but an increased number of years and crimes : till the harvest of his iniquity was full ; and his punishment, for being delayed, would have fallen so much the heavier ?

Yet still, even in the moment of executing His righteous sentence, GOD, even then, thought on mercy ; and comforted the unfortunate and guilty pair,—with the promise, that the power of that wicked spirit, who thus had ruined them,

should be subdued at length, and overpowered by the Seed of the woman.—The general impression of hope and comfort, derived from these merciful words, has spread through the whole world; and has never been entirely lost, even among the most ignorant heathens. In all the fables of the Greeks and Romans, the truth is still dimly shadowed — of the fall of man, and of the promised restoration of his race to happiness, by the means of a God, who was to come down to earth. But among the Jews, through a long succession of holy prophets, this hope was explained and perpetuated. Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, as we are told by St. Jude, that the Lord should come with thousands of His saints.¹ To Abraham was it promised by God—that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed. Jacob foretells on his death-bed the coming of *Shiloh*², (a Hebrew word signifying a person sent from Heaven;) and saith expressly, that, in Him, the sceptre of Judah should end; and to Him should the gathering of the nations be. Moses too, himself, in the book of Deuteronomy, foretells the rising of another great prophet like unto himself; and even the wicked Balaam declares, by God's command, that there should arise a Star out of Jacob.³

¹ Verse 14.

² Genesis, xlix. 10.

³ Numbers, xxiv. 17.

—The time would fail me if I were to run through all the testimonies, which the holy prophets have borne to this glorious hope : a hope, which was their joy in prosperity ; and their comfort in labour, in sorrow, and in danger. When righteous Job was mourning at once under the tortures of his body, the ruin of his fortune, and the unkind suspicions of his friends ;— “I know,” saith he, “that my Redeemer liveth ; and shall stand at the latter day on the earth !” “And they, of whom the world,” saith St. Paul, “was not worthy,” Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel, and their companions in suffering, who were stoned, sawn asunder, tempted, and slain with the sword ; who wandered about in sheep skins, and goat skins ; being desolate, afflicted, tormented ; all these had the same hope ; and obtained a good report, through faith in the promise that was made.¹— Scarcely can we read a single psalm without finding mention of the anointed of God ; against whom the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers took counsel, in vain,—of the Lord, [“*my* Lord,” David calls Him, as being descended from his loins, according to the flesh,] who was to sit on God’s right hand, till His enemies were made His footstool. Almost all the hymns of David, indeed, bear allusion to this subject ; and even when praying for himself, or for Solomon,

¹ Hebrews, xi. 37—39.

he never fails to recur to the peculiar glory of his family,—the King whose name was to endure for ever, whom all nations should call blessed.

All the allusions of David are, however, far surpassed in clearness by the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah saith, in his 7th chapter, “A virgin shall conceive and bear a Son; and shall call His name Immanuel:” which in English signifies “*God among us men.*” “To us” [he says, again, in his 9th chapter,] “to us a Child is born; to us a Son is given; and the government shall be on His shoulders; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” This same Person, we are told in another place, was to take away the vail of ignorance, which was cast upon the heart.¹ He was to swallow up death in victory; to wipe away tears from all faces; and to take away the rebuke (or accusation) of His people from off all the earth.²

The same Divine Person is foretold by Jeremiah, as the Righteous Branch, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS³: and by Ezekiel, under His family name of David, as the prince and shepherd of Israel⁴: and by Daniel, the time of His coming is expressly stated to be seventy weeks,—a common way among the Jews of describing 490 years,—being seventy times seven years, from the going

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 16.

² Isaiah, xxv. 8.

³ Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.

⁴ Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24.

forth of the Persian commandment to restore and build Jerusalem. This prophecy, which the Jews, even now, cannot deny, though their hearts are slow to believe it, even points out the exact year in which Christ was to suffer; and declares that 62 weeks, or 434 years after the time of Nehemiah, Messiah the Prince, was to be cut off, but not for Himself.¹

And this, naturally, leads us to the second part of the subject, namely, that this Mighty Conqueror and Saviour was to be made perfect by suffering: And that, before He entered into His glory, it was necessary that He should be despised, rejected, and tormented.—This I shall defer till next Friday; beseeching you, in the meantime, to reflect seriously on the truths which you have heard this day.

Remember, that all mankind were naturally unable to satisfy the justice of God; that the favour, which He had shewn to Adam, was lost for ever by Adam's disobedience; and that it was in the power of no man to redeem his brother, or to give unto God a ransom for him.

Remember, that, in this danger and distress of the world, God had, in every age, spoken comfort to mankind; promising them a wonderful Deliverer, who should cleanse them from their sins; redeem them from death and misery;

¹ Daniel, ix. 25, 26.

teach them to serve and to please God ; and give them that peace, which the world cannot give, — peace with themselves, and with their Maker. Remember, lastly, that we are all partakers in these precious benefits ; that, on us, the ends of the world are come ; to us, the mysteries of Providence are revealed ; we have heard those truths, which prophets and kings have, in vain, longed earnestly to hear ; and have understood those secret things of God, which the angels desired in vain to look into. We are not now instructed, by dark sayings, or by mysterious ceremonies ; but have the true word of Life, “ which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”¹ Our Priest and Leader is not, as Moses was, a mere man, like ourselves ; but sitteth at the right hand of His Father, hearing our prayers, guiding our actions, comforting us in sorrow, and asking pardon for our sins at the throne of mercy and of righteousness.

The present week is particularly proper for such thoughts as these ; and our Church has appointed, for every day in it, short passages of Scripture ; which may be read, and considered, attentively, with great profit and comfort. In the portions of Scripture appointed for the Epistles of Monday and Tuesday, you will learn the majesty of Christ’s Person ; and how glorious

¹ St. John, i. 9.

and honourable He is in the sight of God. When you read these things, commune with your own hearts; and consider, with yourselves, how can you escape if you neglect so great a salvation, such wonderful and exceeding mercy. The men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah; — the queen of the South came from far to hear the wisdom of Solomon; — Ahab himself was changed for awhile, and put on sackcloth, when Elijah rebuked him: And shall not we repent, when God Himself hath come down from Heaven to visit us; — shall not we be converted, whom the living voice of Christ calls every day to amendment? Oh, while you yet feel the motions of His Spirit; while the door is yet open to salvation; — arise, and go to your Father, that Father Almighty, who is the God, the friend, and the comforter, of all, who, with hearty repentance, turn unto Him. To Him, in Three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be praise, honour, and glory, now, and for ever!

SERMON XXI.

EASTER SUNDAY.

REVELATION, i. 17, 18.

*He laid His right hand on me, saying unto me, Fear not ;
I am the first and the last : I am He that liveth, and was
dead ; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen ; and
have the keys of hell and of death.*

JOHN, the beloved disciple, had been, after various torments and sufferings, banished by the cruel Emperor Domitian to the small and desolate island of Patmos. While thus persecuted for the word of God, and for the testimony, of the Lord Jesus Christ, he was visited on the Lord's day by a dreadful and majestic vision. He beheld, in all the glory of the eternal God, one like unto the Son of Man ;—like Him whom he had seen poor and lowly ;—the Son of Man, who had been betrayed into the hands of sinners ; whose wanderings he had followed ; whose sufferings he had seen ; and who had loved him, above all his companions ; the same, of whose humiliation and death you have heard ; who

gave His back to the smiters, and His cheek to them that plucked off the hair ; whose life was accounted madness : and His end, without honour. But He was now arrayed in long and kingly robes ; His girdle was of gold ; His eyes, as the fire ; His feet, as bright as burning brass ; His voice, as the sound of many waters ; seven stars were in His right hand ; a flaming sword went out before Him ; and His countenance was as the Sun shining in His strength. “ Fear not,” He said, as His ancient follower sunk in lifeless terror at His feet, “ I am the first and the last : I am He that liveth and was dead ; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen ; and have the keys of hell, and of death.”

In this declaration of our Lord, now glorified, and raised above principalities and powers and archangels, we have clearly laid down both His nature and eternity ;—that He is the first and the last :—His death and resurrection ;—that He liveth and was dead :—and, lastly, His glorious and triumphant condition ; that He is alive for evermore, and hath the keys of hell, and of death ;—that is, that by Him only we can hope to escape either of these calamities.

Not that these truths were now first discovered to this beloved Apostle ; who had often heard similar declarations from the mouth of Christ Himself ; both while He abode among men, and while, for forty days after His resurrection, He

shewed Himself, and ate, and drank, with His disciples. But all these truths were now confirmed to him : and he received the conviction, that the same lowly Prophet, with whom he had conversed on earth, was the identical Word of God who now appeared arrayed in all the terrors and majesty of His Father's Godhead. And, indeed, long before the union of God and man in the person of our Saviour, the Second Person in the Trinity had appeared to Daniel, in almost the same form, which now presents itself to John ; and, in all probability, the transfiguration of our Saviour on the Mount, and the glorious apparition, which cheered the last moments of the Martyr Stephen, were not unlike the appearance, before which the beloved disciple fell as dead.

But to those, who profess to believe in Christ, and in every word which He has spoken, it is unnecessary to add further proof of His Divinity. — His resurrection, too, is confirmed by so many witnesses, — witnesses who had known Him well, and could not be mistaken ; who had no interest to serve, and could not, therefore, intend to deceive ; that we cannot, if we admit any evidence at all, reasonably doubt their truth. He was seen in every possible situation ; sometimes by many, sometimes by few witnesses : His voice, His manner, they had all an opportunity of observing ; and even when He again visits the earth — thus arrayed in Majesty, and

after he had ascended into Heaven,—St. John still recollects His features, and knows that this was the Son of Man.

I shall confine myself, therefore, to the observation of the latter part of our Lord's assertion, which respects His present power and authority; and the manner, in which we are to regard Him, as the author of immortality and salvation: He has the keys of Hell and of death. This authority over the two great enemies of mankind, who had, from the time of Adam, held the world in captivity, was first shewn in His own resurrection: for well may we trust His promises, who has performed every thing, with respect to His own person; well may we hope, that He in whom our nature was clothed with Divinity, who hath ascended up on high, and led captivity captive,—has also received those gifts for the sake of us men. We may well and reasonably hope, when we read of the glories, which He at present enjoys, that the time will also come, according to His repeated promise; when the righteous, also, shall shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father.

And, indeed, whatever probability a future life may obtain from reason, though the resurrection of our body agrees entirely with the general experience of nature, and with all the little knowledge which we have of ourselves and of our Creator, yet the main authority, which we have

for our hope, is derived from the resurrection of Christ.—It is true, that the immortality of the soul has been the universal belief of nations ; and that the resurrection of the body, though much more difficult for unassisted human wisdom to comprehend, has nothing in it, which can cause wonder or hardness of belief, in those, who have watched the progress of the silkworm from a caterpillar to a butterfly ; who have seen the corn, committed to the ground, spring up again in a more glorious form ; and the scattered seeds of a single plant produce again a perfect flower. When these things fall under our common observation, we cannot think it incredible, that God should raise the dead :—we see He does so daily ; and is the resurrection of a human body more impossible to God, than the reproduction of a plant, or of an insect ? Or can it be more difficult to restore, than to have, at first, created out of nothing. “Thou fool,” said St. Paul, when he bade the unbeliever give his attention to the works of nature, “thou fool, that, which thou sowest, is not quickened, except it die.”¹ And however little, as I observed before, a bodily resurrection was known to the heathen, yet in the cares of burial, in reverence paid to the dead, and in that fear of spirits, from which no nation has been free, we perceive how strongly the voice

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 36.

of nature whispers in our ear the suspicion of a future state, and some wonderful purpose, for which the souls of men are preserved, even when their means of feeling, or of acting, are, according to our ideas, dissolved.

But still, the idea, which heathen nations entertained of the future life after death, is, in many points, inactive, and unsatisfactory. They allowed to their dead, indeed, a few short-lived pleasures ; rather a vision of happiness than its reality ; till, after a certain revolution of time, they were again to be united to other bodies ; and to undergo again all the difficulties, and the faults, which had afflicted their former residence on earth. In no religion, but the true, do we find it promised, that the body shall receive its recompense, as well as the soul :—that the faith and obedience of a good man's life shall not be rewarded by merely melting into the air ; or by that contemplation and spiritual employment, which a mere spirit might enjoy : but that a life of active happiness and active obedience shall be prolonged to all eternity ; that the body, which has suffered, together with the soul, in this life, shall, together with the soul, triumph in the life to come ; and that, weak and feeble as it now is, it shall not perish, but be improved, when this corruption shall put on incorruption ; and this mortal, immortality.

This glorious and comfortable doctrine of a future life, such as I have now described, and as we find it delivered in the Epistles of St. Paul, and in the Book of the Revelation, was not only unknown to the Heathen; but, before the time of Christ, is, I think, no where positively revealed even to the chosen people of God. But, though in the books of Moses, the promises of reward are mostly confined to this life; — that they should continue long in the land that was given them; — that they should see their children's children, and the like; — though such were the only rewards promised by the Jewish covenant, yet, in expectation of a Messiah, we find in different prophets very strong assurances of a future resurrection. "Though worms," says Job, one of the most ancient of the prophets, "though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."¹ In Isaiah, it is written, when he comforts the Israelites in their captivity, "thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise; awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs; and the earth shall cast out her dead."² Many years afterwards, when the destruction, which Isaiah had foretold, had fallen so heavily on the Jews, that they thought it scarcely

¹ Job, xix. 26.

² Isaiah, xxvi. 19.

in the power of God to restore them, — to cure Ezekiel of his distrust, God convinces him by a still greater miracle. He gives him, as a sign, the restoration of those from whom breath and life and moisture had departed. “O, ye dry bones,” saith he, “hear the word of the Lord, — thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; behold I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live.”¹ And Daniel, who, of all men, had the clearest revelations both when and how the Redeemer should come, — he too exults in this his greatest triumph; and prophesies that “many of them, that sleep in the dust, shall awake; some, to everlasting life; and some, to shame, and everlasting contempt.”² And, unless some such promise had been made to the holy prophets, and to those other worthy men, who looked for the salvation of Israel, we cannot readily conceive what reward they looked for; or what advantage they derived from the future coming of the Messiah. If Abraham, if Isaac, and if Jacob, after a life of labour and wandering, had descended to the silent tomb, never to be roused again; and never to hope, that their long sleep would be broken by the morning beams of righteousness; it was little profit to them, that “in their seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed.” Abraham could not

¹ Ezekiel, xxxvii. 4, 5.

² Daniel, xii. 2.

then have seen the day of Christ, or when he saw it, have been glad. Little reason had Daniel to rejoice in the multitude of his revelations, if he were to die a captive in a foreign land, without hope of witnessing the future glories of Sion. Far different, however, was that comfort which he received, when he was promised to share in all the mercies that were foretold to him: when God said, "Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days."¹

Still, however, this life without end, this immortality of body and soul, was never promised even to these great and good men, but as the freegift of God, through the merits of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Job, whom I have mentioned, hoped for future life, only because he knew that his Redeemer lived: nor is there any promise of eternal happiness, in Scripture, on any other grounds, than His merits and mercy. I trust, indeed, you have not so far forgotten my discourses of last Sunday and Friday, as to imagine that any services of men could deserve so high a reward. The first covenant, which was made with Adam, was, so far as we know, nothing more than enjoyment of earthly happiness, so long as he continued obedient: and, in the law of Moses, no rewards were openly pro-

¹ Daniel, xii. 13.

posed, but peace, and plenty, and length of days. The enjoyment of years without end, and happiness without a possibility of falling, is purchased for us, only by the merits and the obedience of Christ.

And, by a due consideration of these truths, we not only understand the infinite value of Christ's sacrifice, but also the illustrious effects which it has produced in our favour. For to shew that His resurrection was for our advantage, as well as for His own glory;—to shew that He then received the power and the office of Captain of the salvation and resurrection of all mankind,—He displayed it in raising, even before the regular time, many bodies of the Saints who slept; who appeared, by His order, to many in the city of Jerusalem. Well, indeed, might it be expected, that He who, when in human shape, and clothed, in part, with the imperfections of mortality, had called the widow's son from his bier, and Lazarus from his grave where he had four days lain,—it might well be supposed, that, in the very moment of His own triumphant resurrection, He should call up others, as the first fruits of His victory; and should enter into the kingdom of God, as the first born of many brethren.

It appears, then, that the resurrection of Christ is of advantage to us: first, as confirming

the truth of all His doctrine, and as proving that He had both power and will to reward all those who had followed Him, and should follow Him, in faith, and, as far as human infirmity will admit, in love, and in obedience. Secondly, that we Christians have, as our particular leader and governor, One, who knows how to pity our infirmities ; One who, having been Himself a man, will aid us against those passions, with which He Himself once struggled ; and will dry up those tears, which He Himself has shed. But, in the third place, these advantages, great as they are, are transcended by the spiritual privileges thus obtained ;—repentance, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. It is this, which makes the Christian covenant more perfect and more merciful, than any which went before it. If Adam, for instance, had remained in Paradise, yet his continuance would not have made us strong ; and with the same risk of falling, we could only have expected, if we fell, death without opportunity of repentance, death of body and soul. Now, if we sin, [and who is there that sinneth not ?] the door of repentance stands open ; and the Holy Spirit is ever urgent with us, to guide and to strengthen us in our return to happiness. And if such be the difference of the assistance afforded us, how much greater is the excellence of our reward ! For mere animal life, for mere worldly

prosperity, we have the happiness of angels held out to us; and every thing which Almighty power and love can bestow.

And are not these enjoyments worth striving for? is not this a salvation, which may well call forth all our strongest efforts, though the gate may be narrow, and the way steep and uneven? What do we behold, what do we hear, which can draw us aside from so glorious a journey, or persuade us to desert our Heavenly Guide, who is leading us forward to happiness and victory? Can this world, of which we all complain, though we all of us love it too well, can it furnish any pleasures, any hopes, which can equal those which God has revealed and promised—those unutterable glories, which were seen by St. Paul, and by St. John? And, on the other side, can a little foolish laughter, or the bad examples of weak and wicked men, [for these trials, and trials like these, are the principal which we have to encounter,] can they be more dreadful, than the curse declared upon impenitent sinners,—the lake, which burneth with brimstone and with fire?

For, do not forget, there are threatenings in the Gospel, as well as promises! Do not suppose, as some false teachers would tell you, that, because Christ has done so much, nothing remains for us to do;—that, because He is victorious, our warfare is brought to an end.—The greater the

privileges, which His blood has purchased, so much the more are we called upon to defend the goodly heritage, which we have received through Him; and to carry into effect, by His help, that work, which He hath begun in us. If we hope to dwell hereafter with the angels of God, let us keep our thoughts and hearts as pure, as those of blessed spirits.— If we hope, that our bodies shall, one day, be summoned from the dust, let us sanctify them now to the service of God, as temples of the Holy Ghost: and, above all, where our treasure is, there let our heart be also. Let us really fix our desires on those Heavens, whither our Saviour Christ is gone before;—let us think on them;—let us pray for them; and do our best to become dead to sin, that we may rise again to happiness!

If such be our endeavour;—if such be our meditation, and our hope; we have an inheritance in the Heavens, which faileth not; of which no violence of devil or man can hinder us: we have a friend, and protector, from whom, if we do not ourselves depart from Him, no power, or spirit, can separate us. In His strength, let us proceed on our journey, through the storms and troubles and dangers of the world. However they may rage and swell, though the mountains shake at the tempests, our rock will not be moved:—we have one friend, who will never

forsake us ; one refuge, where we may rest in peace, and stand in our lot at the end of the days. That same is He, who liveth, and was dead ; who is alive for evermore ; and hath the keys of hell, and of death.

SERMON XXII.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ST. JOHN, xx. 19.

Peace be unto you.

WITH this merciful salutation, did our Lord, on the first Sunday after His resurrection, address the first congregation assembled in His name.— A little flock it was, and surrounded by many hungry wolves, in a world where all men were its enemies; yet He, who knew all things, and in whose hand all things were, foretold to them, peace and dominion and security; the gates of Hell, He had formerly said, should not prevail against His Church; and now, in their greatest danger, He is at hand, to make good His promise. “At evening,” saith the Scripture, “being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, came Jesus, and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.”

I have already, on former occasions, explained and enforced the indubitable nature of that proof, which these frequent appearances of Christ, after His death, afford of the reality of His resurrection ; and of the firmness of that faith, which is built on so sure a foundation ; and against which the gates of Hell, we have God's word for it, shall never finally prevail. But there are three further purposes, which the gracious visit, and gracious words, of our Saviour may, on the present occasion, appear intended to serve ; and which, at least, may afford very useful lessons to every Christian who considers them attentively. I mean, first, the sanction thus afforded to the universal custom of keeping Sunday, on the first day of the week, as a Christian Sabbath, and a day of devout thanksgiving to the Lord Jesus ; who, as on this day, rose from that grave, whither He had descended for our sins. "On the first day of the week, when the disciples were assembled together, came Jesus, and stood in the midst of them."

We have here the first observance of the Lord's day, by the Apostles, on the Sunday immediately following that of His resurrection ; and that this their meeting on that day was neither by chance, nor without the gracious approbation of their departed Lord, is plain from two considerations. First, that Christians, from that time forward, never ceased, or neglected, to

have their solemn assemblies on the first day of the week ; which thenceforth bore the appropriate name of the Lord's day. Secondly, that Christ not only honoured this their first meeting with His visible presence ; but that He returned also on the next following Sunday ; “ after eight days again His disciples were within ; — then came Jesus ; and stood in the midst ; and said, Peace be unto you : ” and again, afterwards, and in the only further revelation of His will, which He has made to mankind, it was on the Lord's day, that He thought fit to display His glory to His beloved apostle, in his banishment of Patmos.

We have, then sufficient grounds for concluding, not only that the keeping holy the Lord's day is, next to the Sacraments, the most ancient, universal, and sacred ordinance, which the Christian Church enjoins ; not only that it is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving—of all others—the most appropriate to the mercies which we have received ; but that we have the implied sanction of the Son of God Himself, for the reverend observance of a day, on which, almost exclusively, He has, since His resurrection, thought fit to reveal His glories to mankind. And those, who are cold, or careless, in their celebration of this weekly festival ; those, whom a little cloud, a little dust, a trifling degree of weariness will keep, on this day, from the service of their Lord and their God, may blush, when

they compare these petty hindrances with the dreadful dangers which could not prevent the apostles and early christians from meeting on this day to shew forth the death, and to celebrate the resurrection, of the Mighty Redeemer.

And, secondly, our reverence for the Lord's day, and our anxiety to join in the public prayers and praises, which the Church of Christ, on this day, offers up to His name, may be greatly increased, by considering the promise which our public, yet more than our private, devotions, have received from Christ, of favour and protection. "If two of you," saith our Saviour, "shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask in my name, it shall be done for them."¹ And in another place, He uses those celebrated words, of the truth of which the event recorded in this day's Gospel is a sufficient pledge: — "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."²—This promise was, as you have heard, visibly performed on the first Lord's day, which was celebrated; and is doubtless still, though not visibly, yet effectually, true of every Christian congregation: and on every returning Sunday, the Lord Jesus Christ is, in an especial manner, present to heal our griefs, and to hear our supplications: and, however plain the building, and however poor

¹ St. Matthew, xviii. 19.

² St. Matthew, xviii. 20.

the flock, the Church, no less than the Temple, hath its resident Divinity; and the Lord is among them, as in the Holy place of Sinai. If such be the case, [and if we believe the promises of God made to us in Scripture, no doubt of its truth can be entertained,] how necessary must it seem, to keep our foot, when we come to the House of the Lord;—to watch over every thought; and to govern every motion of the body; as well knowing in whose presence we are. Are we filled with awe in thinking of the Day of Judgement; and of the appearance of Christ, when He shall come to reward all men according to their works?—and do we forget, that, here also, He is present in the midst of us; His eye observing our actions, and reading every thought of the heart? If we do not believe this, how are we Christians? If we do believe it, can we refrain from crying out, with the patriarch Jacob, on an occasion not very different, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not; how dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God: and this is the gate of Heaven.”¹

The manner, thirdly, of our Lord’s salutation, though it were at that time, and still continues, the usual form of expressing friendship, or civility among the eastern nations, yet, when

¹ Genesis, xxviii. 16, 17.

it is compared with the avowed object of His coming into the world, may well deserve our serious attention ; and may instruct us, perhaps, both in what place, and in what manner, we may best hope to obtain a blessing similar to that, which He thus bestowed on His disciples, — that peace, which the world cannot give.

In all former ages, and by every prophet who foretold the Messiah's coming, had His reign been spoken of, as a period of uninterrupted peace. In those days, saith Isaiah, they shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks ; nation shall not rise against nation ; neither shall they learn war any more. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb ; and the calf, and the young lion and the fatling together ; and a little child shall lead them : they shall not hurt nor destroy, in all My Holy Mountain, saith the LORD. When Christ was born into the world, the angels sang peace and good will to mankind ; and the title of " Prince of Peace " was that, which best appeared to suit His benevolent errand. Nor can any doubt be entertained, that, so soon as the knowledge of those virtues, which the Gospel enjoins, shall really be universal among mankind ; — [and that this blessed day must come, when the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, the sure word of prophecy doth not cease to assure us,]

— there can be no doubt, I say, that, when all men, not only in name, but in very truth and sincerity, are Christians, — war and fighting, which, as St. James assures us, spring only from unchristian lusts¹, must cease from that time forward; since conquest and offensive war will be no more thought of; and since defensive war will be, therefore, unnecessary. The conqueror and the tyrant will cease to exist; and the brave defenders of their country will therefore have no occasion to continue their honourable exertions; but, to the strife of blood, a new and nobler contest may succeed; — which, among the nations, can do most worthy honour to God and His Son; — which can outstrip the rest in the splendour of its charitable and religious institutions, and in the Christian education of the poor.

But though the Church of Christ will be thus blessed and glorious in its rest and its destined triumph, it was not to be supposed, that such happiness was to be procured by any means but by a long and patient endurance, for His sake, of oppression and offence and cruelty. The Church triumphant is destined to repose in peace; but the Church militant must first be tossed in the storm: and the very character of Christ's pure and peaceable religion would, as being utterly opposed to the spirit of the world,

¹ St. James, iv. 1.

produce, of course, by that diversity, disturbance and difference among mankind. “Think ye,” said Christ, “that I am come to send peace on earth. I tell you nay, but rather division.” And accordingly, as if compelled by this necessity, in the last hour of His life, and at the time when that guardian care was about to be withdrawn from His disciples, which had hitherto preserved those defenceless sheep, unharmed amid the wolves, He not only permits, but commands, His disciples to provide themselves, for their own defence, with the necessary instruments of death. A total absence of war and bloodshed is not, then, to be expected in a state of human society, so imperfect as the world still offers to us; and as the promise of Christ to His disciples, and of the angels to the shepherds, was immediate, and without any exception of place or time, it is plain, that another kind of peace and tranquillity is signified in both places; distinct from, and independant of, all chances and changes of this mortal life; and the seat of which is, consequently, in the mind: — that peace, I mean, which subsists between a man’s heart and himself; — that peace, which is declared by a Merciful God to a repentant and pardoned creature. For, if we consider the power, which the being thus at peace in ourselves confers on the human heart, — to bear not only with patience, but with cheerfulness, the bitterest draught of

sorrow, and the wildest storms of adversity ; if we reflect, on the other hand, what little power is possessed, by outward circumstances of repose and tranquillity, to give quiet to the distracted soul ; it cannot be doubted, that, where there is peace with God, that man cannot be utterly unhappy ; as on the other hand, where God is our enemy, where we know that we have offended Him, and do not yet know, that our pardon is granted through Jesus Christ, we must be utterly wretched, whatever be the seeming smiles of the world, or our outward fortune. The spirit of a man is strength against adversity ; but a wounded spirit who can bear ? And that this peace it is, which our Saviour promised to His followers, is further plain from the very words in which He makes His promise. “ Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you ; not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”¹ And where this peace was to be found, and in what manner obtained, may be learnt from the history, which has been read in the Gospel of this morning.

The apostles, when Christ thus came to give them peace, were assembled in the house of prayer, and on the Lord’s day. Is there any, who hath not yet been reconciled to God through Christ ; any, who is, at this hour, in a

¹ St. John, xiv. 27.

state of war with his Maker? let him come hither; and the great Mediator of earth and Heaven will open unto him the new covenant of mercy and forgiveness. Is there any, who has once tasted the good gifts of God; but whose heart is weak; and, with much doubt and sorrow, looks back on his ancient sins, and on his present hardness of unbelief? any who mourns within himself, that he can neither love God so well, nor believe in Him so truly, nor obey Him so perfectly, as he would gladly do?—Let him come hither, who is thus heavy laden: and the meek and merciful Jesus will wipe away his tears; will make light the yoke, which now weighs him to the dust; and will enable him to find rest for his soul. Is there any, who has mourned under the weight of human calamities; whose heart, like the heart of Peter, has failed within him for fear, as he has beheld the boisterous winds and waves of mortal life; and whose faith has been perplexed, while he has contemplated the violence and pride of successful villainy; let him come hither to the sanctuary of God, to learn the end of wicked men: let him seek refuge, in the secret place of Christ's tabernacle, from the rebuke of the tyrant. Is there any, lastly, whose spirits have risen in honest triumph in beholding the mercy and justice of the Most High displayed in the destruction of sinners, and in the probable resto-

ration of outward peace to the world, which we have for twenty years contended for¹, and prayed for, and hoped for vainly, let him mix his thanksgiving for this wonderful deliverance with a godly fear, lest, if we shew ourselves unworthy of the mercy thus bestowed, a worse thing may come unto us. Let him remember, that godliness is the strength of a nation, whether in peace or in war; and that, let the kings of the earth take what counsel they may, “there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked!”

¹ Written in 1814.

SERMON XXIII.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

NUMBERS, xxiii. 10.

Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his !

IN the history of the prophet Balaam, whose words these are, and whose intercourse with Balak, king of Moab, is the subject of the first Lesson for this morning's service, there are many points so singular in themselves, and so instructive in their consequences, as to make it a very useful task to explain their difficulties, and to enquire into their force and meaning.

Amongst the various tribes who dwelt in that wide range of mountainous country, east of Jordan, and north of the great wilderness, a country now abandoned to drought and barrenness, but abounding, in ancient times, with flocks and pasturage, and with wealthy and warlike inhabitants, there were two very distinguished nations ; Moab, descended from the horrible

connection of Lot with his daughter ; and Midian, sprung from the loins of Abraham by his second wife, Keturah.

It should appear from several passages in Scripture,—as when Moab and Midian are mentioned indifferently, sometimes one, and sometimes the other ; and where Midianitish women are expressly called the daughters of Moab,—that, in the time of Moses, these two tribes composed in fact a single nation :—that they were united, at least, in the closest bands of alliance and kindred ; and that a number of little kings among them obeyed the superior authority of that Balak, the Moabite, of whom I have already spoken. These nations were, as we have seen, of the same stock with Israel itself: their language was no doubt the same ; and, though they had wickedly and foolishly corrupted the true religion of their fathers, by the worship of an idol, called Baal Peor, yet there is every reason to suppose, both from this history, and from the other parts of Scripture, where they are mentioned, that they still retained the belief of the one great God, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.

It was to Jethro, the high priest of Midian, and doubtless a priest of the true God, that Moses fled, after he had killed the Egyptian ; and in whom he found not only a protector but a father-in-law : and through the whole of the

present history, we find, I think, undoubted proof, that, whatever might be the peculiar superstitions of Moab,—and such there doubtless were,—yet that Balak, no less than Balaam, had a perfect knowledge of the name of Jehovah. Notwithstanding all these reasons for good will and confidence between the nations of Israel and Moab, we find the latter exceedingly disturbed at the approach of so vast a multitude ; and expressing their apprehension, that this great company would “lick up all that were round about them, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field.”¹ Yet for fears like these they had not in truth the smallest reason. It was not against them, the Israelites were going forth to war : it was not their land, which was promised to Jacob for a possession :—it was Canaan, and Canaan only, whose wicked inhabitants were condemned by God to destruction : and Edom, and Ammon, and Moab were to be considered by His people, as kindred ; and their land, and their people to be secured from every trespass or violation.—“Ye are to pass,” said God, “through the coast of your brethren, the children of Esau which dwell in Seir ; and they shall be afraid of you :—take ye good heed unto yourselves, therefore, meddle not with them ; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot-breadth ; for I

¹ Numbers, xxii. 4.

have given Mount Seir unto Esau, for a possession.”¹ They were to pay for all the refreshments which they procured. “Ye shall buy meat of them for money, that ye may eat; and water of them for money, that ye may drink.”² And to the Moabites the same treatment was expressly ordered. “Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle: for I will not give thee of their land, for a possession.”³ But, notwithstanding this avowed intention of God, notwithstanding the peaceable demeanour of the Israelites, and the long circuit which they had made from Ar to Arnon,—in order to avoid all unnecessary trespassing on their lands, the suspicions and malice of Moab remained unabated. The Israelites had power, they saw, to injure them; and, where there was power, their wicked hearts made them conclude, that the will would not be wanting.—And thus it has always been, in the progress of the Church of God, and of God’s religion through the world; that worldly men have beheld its advances with an evil and suspicious eye. They will not believe, that the hopes of a Christian are exclusively directed to his heavenly Canaan; and that, with such an heritage in view, he cannot, if he would, descend to envy the children of Moab their rocks and wildernesses.—In every scheme for

¹ Deut. ii. 4, 5.

² Verse 6.

³ Verse 9.

the advantage of Christianity, they suspect some worldly projects, some danger to themselves, or to their power: and violent and ambitious men have, accordingly, in every age of the world, stood up against the Lord and His Anointed.— How wisely, or how successfully, the story of Balaam may shew.

The manner, in which the malice of the Moabites was shewn, is the wildest and most singular which can be imagined;—though, in the ancient times of the world, and among the heathen nations of the east, as well as in Greece and Rome, by no means an uncommon one. They send the elders of their united nations to invite Balaam, a prophet, or reputed prophet, of the Lord,—to come and curse the objects of their jealousy; in the hope, that God might be moved by prayers, or by sacrifices, or, as should appear, from what follows, by certain idle ceremonies of magic, to give up to destruction the race whom He had as yet so wonderfully favoured.

This Balaam has been generally, but very absurdly, supposed to have lived on the banks of the Euphrates, at a great distance from Moab; an idea plainly inconsistent with Scripture, which implies that the distance from his home to the mountains of Moab was at most a short day's journey. More probably, he was the high

priest of Midian, and the successor to that good Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses. To him, therefore, the messengers of Balak came; to whom, on consulting God, he returns an honest answer; namely, that the Lord had blessed Israel; and that he could not, and would not, go with them, to curse Israel. Afterwards, however, on a more distinguished embassy being sent, and mighty offers made to induce him to compliance, he has the insolence, as if he were not satisfied with the known will of God, already on a former instance declared;—he has the insolence to desire the princes of Moab to stay in his house, in the hope that he might reconcile his duty with his interest, and might prevail on God to relax the rigour of His denial.—What madness does this appear! Could a prophet venture to weary God with prayers, to grant him that which He had already forbidden? or did he suppose, that the Lord of spirits could be wheedled, like a child, out of His declared will; or moved, by such weak indulgence to the worldly interest of his priest? But mark the event.—God, who not unfrequently punishes the wicked by granting their own unholy desires, no longer opposes the journey, on which the heart of Balaam was bent; though, by a dreadful vision on the road, and by the wonderful miracle of the ass speaking with a human voice,

He warns him, that the errand was unholy ;— and lays the strictest charge on his tongue, not to speak otherwise than God should dictate.

Thus cautioned, the prophet proceeds on his journey. It might be supposed, that he durst not disobey a command so awefully given ; and that he must, at every moment, recollect the drawn sword of the Angel, which had so lately terrified him. And, indeed, we do not find, that his answers to Balak were otherwise, than a prophet of the Lord might reasonably be expected to utter. Nor, when led from place to place, and from sacrifice to sacrifice, by the restless anxiety of Balak, does he vary in the least from the truth which was delivered to him. He still continues to declare the glory of the tents of Israel ;—and at length, in a holy rapture which none but a true prophet could have felt, he goes on to the latter days of the Messiah, the Star, which was to come out of Jacob, and the Sceptre, out of Israel.

So pure was the faith, and so perfect the knowledge, of Balaam ; and so truly did the spirit of God descend upon him. But melancholy, indeed, the task will be to examine the rest of his history. As yet, except in the single instance of his importuning God, the second time, for permission to go with the Moabitish Elders, we have seen but little to blame in his conduct ;—his answers were true and honest ;

and if the multiplication of the altars, and the repetition of the sacrifices, may be supposed to shew a wicked desire to wrest a curse from God ; yet much of this may be attributed to the presence, and authority, of Balak, the chief of his people. But, no sooner was he returned home, than we find this same prophet lending himself to all the evil passions of his countrymen ; attempting to seduce, and render accursed, the people, whom he himself had publicly blessed ; and giving an advice to his master, which, for subtlety and malice, the devil himself could hardly have surpassed.

He too, like Balak, was jealous of the power of Israel ; he too was sensible, that they had really the protection of God ; and that, while thus defended, all attempts against them would be vain. The question was, then, how to estrange them from the service, and consequently, from the love, of Jehovah. “ Send harlots into their camp,” was this wicked prophet’s advice ; draw their youth, first into fornication ; and then, into idolatry : and so shall the blessing of God be turned into a curse ; and the pillar of the Cloud, which now protects their camp, be changed into a consuming fire to destroy their nation in a moment. This devilish advice was taken ; and had nearly succeeded. The Israelites readily fell into the snare. From such connections, their natural consequence fol-

lowed; they were enticed to burn incense to Baal-Peor, the idol, whom these harlots revered. A plague was sent by the Lord into the army of Israel: and if the resolute piety of Phineas, the grandson of Aaron, had not put a stop to the wickedness of the people, the hopes of Balak would, indeed, have been accomplished.¹

As it was, the snares of Balaam fell upon himself and his nation; the Israelites, who were before instructed to pass the Moabites and Midianites in peace, now fought against, and almost destroyed, them; and besides, Balak himself, who, since he is not mentioned, probably perished in battle, five petty kings, besides an innumerable multitude of men and women, all perhaps, except those who fled to the mountains, were involved in a common slaughter.

It appears, then, that these wicked men drew down upon themselves a storm, which had, else, had another object: but leaving them to their fate, it will be more important to us to consider the character and conduct of Balaam.—First, We may observe, that this man, whose heart was so far from being true to God, who was full of covetousness and malice and ambition, yet even he was a prophet of the Lord; even he was honoured with visions and miracles, and had a right and ardent faith in the Messiah. So true it

¹ Numbers, xxv.

is, that something more than a faith in Christ, and a knowledge of our duty, is necessary to salvation; since they cannot of themselves preserve us from falling into the most horrible wickedness; and so true is that saying of our Lord, that there were many, who had even cast out devils, and done marvellous works in His name, whom yet, at the day of judgement, He would deny that He knew.—Secondly, however, it may be noticed, that wicked as Balaam was, still, there is no doubt, that the Spirit of God was upon him, as a priest, and a prophet; and that his curse, or blessing, so long as he spake in conformity to the will of God, would undoubtedly be brought to pass.—Hence we may learn, that the ministers of God's word, lawfully appointed, however careless or unworthy their lives may be as men, are yet still ministers and priests of God; and that the sacraments and prayers which they as such offer up, are as powerful to call down blessing, as if their conduct were, in all respects, conformable; and that therefore, while the prayers and ceremonies are such as God has appointed, we may rest in faith, that His blessing will not be wanting; and that it does not become us to forsake the Church, because the practice of some of its members is careless or improper.—Thirdly, it is well worth the attention of us all, to reflect on the strange inconsistencies of Balaam's conduct, who dared not curse the tribes of Israel himself;

and yet dared venture to seduce them, and to render them, as far as he could, liable to the curses of God. He knew that they were the favourites of Heaven; that their way was right; and at his latter end, he wished to resemble them; yet, far from imitating them in his life, he sought, by every means in his power, to turn them from the good course, which they were then, according to his own acknowledgment, pursuing.

This may seem like madness; and madness, St. Peter, in his second Epistle, calls it: but it is a madness not altogether uncommon in the world.

Have we not known many men who, in their cooler or more serious moments, when sick, or sober, or in low spirits, would readily acknowledge the necessity of a religious life; who would wish, with a sigh, that they were as good men as such, or such, among their neighbours; desiring, in short, with Balaam, that they might die the death of the righteous; who yet were not only living a life of all others most contrary to such a death,—but were actually anxious, by idle jests, by flattery, by abuse, by guilty merriment, to draw their more prudent neighbours from what, they then chose to call, their unnecessary strictness?

And are not these men acting in some degree like Balaam?—And what friendship is their's,

who would seek, in such wanton folly, to suppress those virtues, the example of which was a silent reproach to their own lives; and to draw their neighbour into the sins, of which themselves have felt the bitter fruit; and to quench the spirit of God, in the heart of their friend?

O ye, whom good education, and virtuous habits, and, above all, the prevailing grace of God, have preserved as yet untainted with habitual sin, ye Israelites of this world, whose road is to the heavenly Canaan, if tempters, such as Balaam, assail your onward course, and strive to lure you from the paths of righteousness; [and tempters, such as he, may be found, alas, too often in every society of life, in every school, in every street, in every tavern;] remember, that, even the wicked themselves being judges, there lives not a man, who would not fain die the death of the righteous; who would not desire, when old age, and sickness, and fear, and sorrow come upon him, to have his latter end like the latter end of those, to whom the death-bed is the gate of Heaven; around whose painful bed, the whispers of angels are heard; and whose eye, when closed in death for a moment, is opened on the glories of the other world.

And remember, that this peaceful death of the righteous man can only be obtained, or hoped for, by those, who have lived the life of the righteous; that every guilty compliance with the

humours of the world, every sinful indulgence of our own passions, is laying up cares and fears for the hour of darkness — and that the remembrance of illspent time will strew our sick bed with thorns ; — and rack our sinking spirits with despair !

SERMON XXIV.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ST. JOHN, xvi. 22.

Ye now therefore have sorrow : but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.

THESE words of our Saviour, and that whole discourse, which is appointed for this morning's Gospel, if we consider them in the meaning, which they bore, when spoken by Him, and in their relation to His immediate followers, are clear in themselves, and have long since received their clear accomplishment. He spoke them, on the eve of His crucifixion,—to support the apostles under that approaching trial ; and they contain, in few words, the history of those events, which were about to take place in the few succeeding days. “ A little while, and ye shall not see me ; and, again a little while, and ye shall see me ; — and because I go to the Father.” As if He had said :—“ The time is now approaching, when I shall be hid from your eyes

in the grave. But that separation shall not be long ; for, after three days, you shall see me again, after my resurrection ; yet will also this second abode with you continue but a little while ; because I must afterwards ascend to the right hand of my Father, which is in Heaven.— Ye now therefore, have sorrow ; but I will see you again ; and your heart shall rejoice ; and your joy no man taketh from you : inasmuch as the knowledge of my victory over sin and death will be to you a source of exultation and gratitude, which no violence of the world can remove, no severity of worldly sufferings obscure.”

Such, then, is the plain and primary meaning of the words, which have been read to you from the altar. But this, I apprehend, is not the only sense, in which the words of our Saviour may be profitably employed ; nor, which it is the leading object of our Church to express, in appointing the present Gospel to be, at this season, yearly read to you.

There is another absence of our Blessed Lord, for which more, far more, are mourners, than those who wept around His cross, and prepared the spices for His sepulchre : and there is another return, to which all Christians as yet look forwards, as to the marriage-supper of the Lamb, and the concluding establishment of His kingdom.

Though the Bridegroom be in Heaven, and

exalted at the right hand of God, we still have cause to fast and weep for our loss in His being taken from us ; and, till He return in glory to deliver His people from their earthly bondage, His people, themselves, must groan, together with the whole creation which travaileth even now as a mother in her pangs ; till the day shall arise, of her deliverance from that burden of vanity to which she was made unwillingly subject.¹ Accordingly, in the sorrows, which our Saviour's little flock endured, during His three days absence in the grave, we have a lively representation of that uneasiness and anxiety, to which the universal Church is, in this world exposed, while expecting the second coming of our Lord. His short absence on that occasion may be compared to the absence (an absence also short, when compared to eternity) which has taken place between His glorious ascent to Heaven, and His infinitely more glorious return to renew and restore all things. The triumphs of His resurrection are but a type of that last Day, when all enemies to His truth, and when all the sorrows, by which good men are here afflicted, shall be put under His victorious feet : and lastly, if " the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord," after His resurrection, though but for a little while ; and when they were so soon again

¹ Romans, viii. 20. 22.

to lose Him, how much greater will be their joy, and the joy of all those, who love the name of Jesus, when they shall receive Him again, to part no more ; and shall enter with Him into the fulness of that joy, which neither men, nor angels, nor their own infirmities, shall thenceforth destroy, or diminish.

According to this application of our Lord's discourse, I shall consider, therefore, in what respects the present state of Christ's flock, and the persons, of whom that flock is composed, can be regarded as a state of trouble ; and secondly, the nature of that succeeding joy, to which they are encouraged to look forward, in that Day, when the Son of God, having accomplished the number of His elect, shall again leave the right hand of His Father, and hasten His everlasting kingdom.

That the world is a scene of trouble and disappointment—is a saying, of which the common complaint of men has, in every age of its continuance, acknowledged the dismal truth. All generations have, in succession made the trial ; and all, have in succession, found, by sad experience, that the pursuits, and cares, and pleasures, of the world were, when weighed in the balance, vanity. Even those, which promise most fair to make men happy, are found, in the end unable to satisfy the expectations of an immortal soul,—and he, who ran through the round of

worldly knowledge, ambition, and enjoyment, was obliged in the end to rise up from the feast of life, wearied, but not satisfied; and as empty of all real good, as when he first sat down to it. But it is not by the disappointment only of our unreasonable expectations,—it is not by the mere deficiency of positive happiness, that the world afflicts its inhabitants. Its enjoyments may be unreal; but it has real pains in store. There are sorrows, which too sensibly convince us of their existence; and no man can be found, if he had kept a register of his life, and of the feelings, which, at different times, had affected him, who would not perceive in that list some days of bitter misery written down; which, if the choice were in his power, no consideration could prevail on him to live over again. These things are so notorious, so common to the greatest and best of the sons of men, that the minds of many of the wisest of our race have been, for a moment, perplexed and staggered by them. When Solomon “returned and considered all the oppressions, that are done under the sun; and beheld the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors, there was power; but they had no comforter”—when he beheld these things—“I praised,” saith he, “the dead which are already dead, more than the living which are yet alive. Yea better is he, than both they, which

hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work, which is done under the sun.”¹

It is true, that, by Christians, to whose eyes the veil of Providence is withdrawn, and to whom the Maker of the world hath explained His reasons for constituting the world, as we behold it,—by Christians, the calamities, which befall us in this life, are justly considered, as a preparation for future blessings ; as a gracious, though bitter remedy for the bad passions, and propensities, of our nature ; and as means, in His hand, who made the Captain of our Salvation perfect through suffering, of bringing, by His Spirit, after His example, many sons to glory.

But however seasonable afflictions may be in themselves, they are painful, nevertheless, to persons lying under them.—Many considerations there, doubtless, are, which may induce a Christian to bear his chastisement with patience ; but none can hinder chastisement from being at the present “not joyous, but grievous.”² “Like the woman, alluded to in the present chapter, we may find reason to entertain our travail with bravery ; to forget, nay even to bless it, for the good fruit we find from it. But the pain is still pain ; and the sense of it is sharp, for the time ; and the throes must be over, before they can be

¹ Ecces. iv. 1, 2, 3.

² Heb. xii. 11.

forgotten—for joy that a man is born into the world.”¹

It is true, indeed, that, in ordinary cases at least, the Christian is no more exposed to worldly affliction, than the world of his unbelieving or ungodly neighbours. There are many worldly evils, to which he is less liable than they; he escapes the consequences of extravagance, of pride, of violent passion and of intemperance: and so many of the miseries of men proceed exclusively from their vices, that, with a reference to these circumstances, we find it written in St. Paul’s first epistle to Timothy, that “godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”² It may be thought, then, that the flock of Christ on earth have no ground for any peculiar sorrow; and that it cannot be said, with truth, that, during His absence, they weep and lament, while the world rejoices.

To this, it might, in the case of the apostles and the early Christians, be sufficient to make the reply, that they were exposed, for conscience’ sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, to many and grievous persecutions; that, in the words of St. Paul, they were made, as it were, the “off-scouring of all things³ ;” and sent out to struggle

¹ Stanhope.

² 1 Tim. iv. 8.

³ 1 Cor. iv. 13.

with the peculiar and bitterest malice of earthly power, and hellish craft, and tyranny. And though I am not one of those, who believe that the prophecy, [by which Christ threatens His disciples in general with the scorn and violence of men,] is to be necessarily fulfilled in the case of every particular Christian ; and though the quiet, which we now enjoy, is such as should call forth our liveliest gratitude, no less than the deepest humiliation when we consider how ill we bear those little trials, to which we are exposed ; yet will in many instances such trials of our faith arise, which, however slight in comparison with those which the apostles encountered, are quite enough to make men seriously unhappy ; and by far too much for human weakness to bear ; if it were not supported by the Spirit of God, The Comforter. The Christian may still be exposed to the ill will of those, of whom his example is a silent reproof ; he may be followed by the ridicule of fools : and imputations of hypocrisy and of fanaticism, may be laid to his charge, which his earthly feelings may be very ill able to endure, with patience ; his interest, and his duty, will sometimes be found at variance ; and, in all these cases, he will have frequent cause to sigh for that glorious termination of the toils and travails of the Church, which the return of his Master is to bring with it.

If we suppose, however, that these common storms pass over his head without harming it; if we suppose a Providence so favourable, as to shelter him from all occasions of outward disquiet; if we suppose him to pass through life unblamed, uninsulted, or unknown; and to be followed to the grave by the tears of that world, which was not worthy of him; — yet can he behold that world, its sins, its miseries, without often feeling a very grievous sorrow for the crimes and distresses of his erring brethren? Can he hear without concern that holy name blasphemed, whereby he is called? Can he see without affliction God's image debased, in his fellow creatures, by sin, by shame, by misery? Can he forbear to mourn for those with whom he sojourneth, when he beholdeth them walking in a vain shadow, and disquieting themselves in vain; labouring for the meat which perisheth; and, in order to fulfil the madness of their lust, neglecting that better heritage, where only true joys are to be found? Like the fabled seer of northern superstition, he foreknows the miserable end of those, who now are mad, and thoughtless; and he reads the characters of death, and judgement, written on the forehead of beauty, and on the cup of merriment: and he mourns over those, who only mock at him as one whose “life is madness, and his end accounted without

honour.”¹ Nor is it only for other men, their sins, their wretchedness, and their danger, that the Christian has cause to mourn. His own lusts distract, his own relapses, terrify him. His entrance into a state of grace, if it be late in life, is only to be achieved by tears, and struggles, and agonies, of which the natural birth-pang is but a feeble image: and they, whose early principles, and pious bringing up, have spared them this bitterness of renovation, have enough, nevertheless, of labour and sorrow;—in the repression, as they arise, of evil passions, and in the rooting out of those weeds, which will, from time to time, spring up in the best cultivated heart. The reformation, and care, of our souls is uniformly described, in Scripture, under figures expressive of suffering. We are to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts; we are to pluck out, or cut off, the eye, or hand, which offends us. And can there be a crucifixion, without torment? Can a right-hand be cut off, without pain? Can an eye be plucked out, and the patient never feel it? No, so long as there are injuries and infirmities, without; and lust and frailty, within; so long, in a greater or less degree, will the Christian’s journey through life be a pilgrimage of tears; and, in a peculiar manner

¹ Wisd. v. 4.

which the world cannot appreciate, the beloved of the Lord will have sorrow !

But, praised be God ! that sorrow is not to last always ; the Christian, as he hath his private suffering, hath also hope, in which no other is allowed to share ; and, as the heart of the good man “ knoweth his own bitterness, so likewise the stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.” Such is that knowledge of the goodness of God, even to His weakest and most sinful creatures, which consoles the Saint even in the midst of those most gloomy thoughts, which the prospect of other men’s sins engenders : and such is that joy, which is promised, in the close of this day’s Gospel :— wherein our Saviour saith, “ I will see you again ; and your heart shall rejoice ; and your joy no man taketh from you.” In order, then, that this heavenly hope of future joy may produce its due effect on your hearts, and on your lives ; I shall now shortly mention those circumstances, in the deliverance which shall be wrought by Christ’s second coming, which, even in our present state of ignorance and weakness, we are able to understand, and to value.

First, then, the second coming of our Lord, and the final establishment of His kingdom, will for ever do away all natural evil from the world ; and will place His followers in a still happier

and more glorious condition, than that which they would have held, had Adam and his children kept their innocency. Those diseases and infirmities which vex the body ; those storms and accidents, which interrupt the due course of the seasons ; the poisonous serpent, and the ravenous beast, shall [be no more ; the thorn, and the thistle, shall be rooted out once more from the garden of God ; want shall be no more ; nor care, nor anxiety ; the voice of mourning shall be heard no more ; and God shall wipe away every tear from every eye. This earth, which sin has defiled ; and which on its seared and blasted forehead bears, so deeply written, the marks of God's wrath, and of a fallen and ruined nature, — this earth, being dissolved first, and purified by fire, shall become a fitting residence for angels and their King ;—and we, who love that King's name, and wait for His appearance, being transformed by His power into the likeness of angels, shall live with Him in peace, and happiness, and glory, of which the brightness of our present days is but a feeble image. What wonder, then, that the apostle, who looked forward to such a termination of his warfare, should faint with expectation, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with immortality ;—when the earth itself, and this unanimated nature, which surrounds us, is described by him as travailing in hope of such a deliverance.

Secondly, the kingdom of our Lord is uniformly described in Scripture, as an eternal *rest* from labour. The curse, which the sin of Adam brought on his posterity, will be then removed from all. One shall not toil for his fellow; the distinction of rich and poor will be, for ever, brought to an end; — and all, in equal happiness, and in equal love of one another, and of their common Saviour, shall join in His praise; as they drink of the rivers of His pleasures, and eat of the fruit of that tree of life, from which the fiery sword shall then be withdrawn for ever. “Verily, there remaineth a rest for the people of God” — a better rest than Paradise itself can supply; since even those blessed souls, who rest beneath God’s altar, were heard by St. John to complain of the delay of that bodily resurrection, when their fulness of joy shall come. “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; Yea, saith The Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them¹ ;” but more blessed still, when they, and we, which remain, shall be caught up by Angels, “to meet the Lord in the air² ;” and when “there shall be a voice of much people in Heaven, saying Alleluia, Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God. — Let us be

¹ Rev. xiv. 13.

² 1 Thess. iv. 17.

glad, and rejoice, and give honour to Him ; for the marriage of the Lamb is come ; and His wife hath made herself ready.”¹

Thirdly, the happiness of the Messiah's kingdom will, in a more particular manner, consist in a perfect freedom from sin. There “the wicked shall cease from troubling.”² We shall have nothing to fear from the enticements, the bad example, the ridicule, the deceit, or the violence, of those who love not God ; and, what is of still greater consequence, we shall be in no danger from ourselves, and from our own corrupt inclinations. The tempter will be bound in chains of everlasting darkness ; the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit will be brought to a happy end, by the flesh itself being sanctified, and cleansed, from all wicked affections. In innocence, no less than in power, and in beauty, we shall become like the angels of God ; and all self reproach, and all that agony, which arises from the fear of future transgression, shall be banished from our hearts. What other blessings it may be the will of God to bestow hereafter on His servants, we cannot tell : and we know, in Scripture, that they are such, as, from their greatness, exceed our present faculties to understand, or to receive. The glory, which then shall clothe us, would now, if

¹ Rev. xix. 1. 7.

² Job, iii. 17.

we could behold it, strike us blind ; the blessings, which will then be scattered on us, would now overwhelm us, in an agony of joy ; and our ears cannot as yet receive that unutterable Song, in which the chosen of Christ shall join. But whatever is bestowed on us will be rendered of still greater value by the recollection that it is *for ever*. We cannot be happy here, because our happiness is only for a time ; and because the danger of future loss must mingle with our purest enjoyment. But in Heaven is no more fear ; we shall rejoice ; and our joy neither men nor angels can deprive us of ; our safety will be as firm, as the throne of God itself ; and our lot will be cast for ever with the lot of His own Beloved Son ; “ where He is, we shall be also.” “ The Tabernacle of God shall be with men ; and He will dwell with them : — 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 : — and there shall be no more curse ; for the throne of God, and the Lamb, shall be in it ; and His servants shall serve Him ; and they shall see His face ; and His name shall be in their foreheads ; and there shall be no night there ; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun ; for the Lord God giveth them light ; and they shall reign for ever and ever.”¹

¹ Rev. xxi. 3, 4. xxii. 3, 4, 5.

Such will be the Kingdom of God: for the coming of which, we daily and nightly pray, in those words, which God Himself hath taught us. Let those, who long for their share in such a glorious heritage, remember, that it is through unfeigned sorrow for their former sins; through an earnest and lifelong struggle to amend their lives; and through a faith in Christ, which despiseth the light afflictions, and the poor enticements, of the present evil world; that they can obtain the crown, which God's mercy offers to their acceptance. Oh, as ye desire, that the day of the Lord shall not be to you a day of blackness and mourning,—think, often and earnestly, on the glorious prospect held out to you in Scripture; and pray to the Lord of the marriage feast, that ye may be found at His coming, clothed in your wedding garments. “Blessed are they, that do His commandment; that they may have right to the tree of life; and may enter in, through the gates, into the city. For without, are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and adulterers, and murderers, and idolaters; and whatsoever loveth and maketh a lie.—He, which testifieth these things, saith, Surely I come quickly,—Amen;—even so come, Lord Jesus!”¹

¹ Rev. xxii. 14, 15, 20.

SERMON XXV.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ST. JAMES, i. 21.

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

IN the verses, which go before my text, and which, together with that text, have been read to you as the Epistle for this morning's service, St. James had been establishing the fact of our total dependance on God ; the perfect freedom of His grace, in the work of redemption ; and the holiness of heart and life, which it was the object of that grace to produce in us. He then lays down, as a necessary consequence of these doctrines, certain practical rules for forwarding in ourselves the work of God's Spirit ; for the avoiding of every thing, whereby its course might be grieved, or hindered ; and for working out our own salvation, by the diligent use of those means, which the Almighty has, in His mercy, afforded to us.

“ Every good gift,” he begins by assuring us,—
“ every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above ; and cometh down from the Father of lights ; with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” These expressions are, by the greater part of learned men, supposed to be intended as an answer to some strange and grievous errors, which, in the time of St. James, were very common, among both Jews and Heathen. As if a man’s good or evil fortune in the world, and even the general character of his passions, temper, and disposition, were owing to certain effects of the stars ; which shone, at his birth, or at those times, when he undertook whatever business he was engaged in. And it is in opposition to this foolish doctrine, that St. James begins by ascribing every good and every perfect gift whatever, not to these creatures of God, which His hand has formed, and which shine but by His decree,—but to God Himself, the Father of these and of every other light ; who does not, like these stars, move from one side of Heaven to the other ; sometimes eclipsed, sometimes setting, sometimes rising :—but “ with whom is no variableness, or shadow of turning ;” and on whose perfect love, unchangeable will, and Almighty and everlasting power we can, therefore, depend with entire and thankful confidence. “ Of His own will,” St. James continues, this great and good God

“begat us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.” Here it is to be first observed, that, as the act of becoming a Christian by baptism and by the Holy Ghost, is, in Scripture, uniformly described as being born again ; so the act, whereby God, through His grace, awakens our minds to a sense of our natural misery and corruption, and of His glorious promises in Jesus Christ,—to repentance, to faith, to conversion, is, in like manner, often compared to natural production : and the Almighty is said to have begotten those anew, whom He thus calls, from the darkness and slavery of a sinful world, to the blessed light and liberty of His children. Thus, we find in the first chapter of St. John’s Gospel, the members of the Christian Church described as “the Sons of God ;” “which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” And St. Paul speaks of those, whom he had himself brought to Christianity, even as if they had been his own children ; and calls Onesimus “his Son, whom he had begotten,” that is converted, “in his bonds.”¹ And we may thus easily understand, how it is that we are said to be “begotten of God by the Word of truth ;” — that is, that we have heard the Gospel, which He hath sent to

¹ Philemon, 10.

us, and have not quenched in our heart that Spirit, whose power makes the outward preaching of the Gospel efficacious to our conversion.

But, further, it is said, that God has thus begotten, and renewed us, in order "that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures." Now there are three senses, in which these words may be understood; and all of which it is highly probable, that St. James intended to convey: the first of which applies in an especial manner, to the case of those early Christians, whom he was, in the first instance, addressing; while the two last are important to all believers alike, in whatever age of the world their pilgrimage may be appointed.

The first fruits of the Jewish Temple, to which the children of God are here compared, were the earliest ripe ears of corn, the first grapes, and first olives, which their land every year produced; and which were brought to the Altar, with grateful songs, and sound of trumpets, and of stringed instruments, in token, that the fruits of the earth were, all of them, Jehovah's bounty to man; and that it was on Him alone that their hope of harvest depended. As being, first, then, in point of time, amid the harvest of faith and holiness, the first returns of that good seed, which the Lord had sown in the field of His heritage, the early Christians of St. James's

days might well be called the first fruits of religion.

But, in another sense, all Christians are so; since, as the first fruits were received with thankfulness, as being the promises and forerunners of the general harvest, so, inasmuch as the last and universal resurrection of the dead, whether to honour or dishonour, is often spoken of in Scripture as the great harvest of Christ, when the wheat and tares shall be alike gathered, though to ends extremely different; so is the change of heart, of hopes, of nature, which takes place, through the operation of God's Spirit, in all Christians, who are worthy of the name, not only a lively figure, and representation; but, in some degree, an earnest assurance of this future and still greater change; so that the resurrection from dead works to a life of grace, may be very fitly called the first fruits of the resurrection to life eternal.

Nor is this all; there is yet another sense, in which the genuine Christian is called, by the word of God, to be "a kind of first fruits of His creatures." The natural first fruits of the Israelitish harvest were, as we have seen, accounted holy to the Lord. They were offered on His Altar: they were consumed in His service; and in the relief of the poor, the widow, and the fatherless; and they, therefore, were thus, like-

wise, a most fit representation of that Church, or society of faithful people whom God had called from an evil world to be His in duty and affection, in will, in word, and in deed ; that, by their bodies, and by their souls, and by all which they possess, they may contribute to His glory, and to the happiness of their fellow creatures.

It is thus, then, that St. James declares our absolute dependance on God, as the Giver of all good things ; and the manner *in* which, and the end *to* which He has sanctified us to Himself, through the Gospel of His Son. He now, with that remarkable attention to the duties of Christians, which is the peculiar distinction of his epistle, proceeds to instruct us in those virtues ; which are the natural and necessary consequences of a serious attention to the truths, which he had just delivered. “ Wherefore,” he continues, “ my beloved brethren ! let every man be swift to hear ; slow to speak ; slow to wrath ; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness ; and receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls.”

As if he had said, “ I have told you, that your good gifts, whether spiritual or worldly, are all bestowed on you ; not by your own exertions, far less by any fancied influence of the stars ; but by that great and unchangeable God, who

is the Maker of those heavenly lights ; and on whom they, as well as you, depend. I have told you, that it was of His own will, of His own free grace, that He has called you to the state of Christian salvation ; to a regenerate life ; and to the hope, after death, of everlasting happiness ; and that He has thus called you to be, in your resurrection from sin here, types and tokens of the great resurrection hereafter ; that, in the mean time, you may be offered at His altar, and cheerfully given up to His service.”

And, from all these truths, what are the lessons which follow ? Surely, that you should listen with eagerness to the sound of that Gospel, which is your charter and title deed to everlasting life ; and which teaches you, how best to perform those duties, which, in your regenerate state, are required of you. That, in order to learn the better, you should not be forward to teach others ; or to dispute with your brethren on the doctrines of your faith, or the terms of your Salvation. He, who is not “ slow to speak,” will have little time for hearing : he, who is given to dispute with others, will be in a very unfit state of mind to learn his own duty. The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God ; and the Christian, who is chiefly anxious to prove his brother in the wrong, will seldom, very seldom, be in a fit temper of mind to profit by the Gospel of the meek and lowly Jesus.

“ Wherefore, lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness :” cast away from you whatever ministers to fleshly lusts, or to the pride of worldly power or wisdom :— strip yourselves of yourselves ; think less of your own merits, your own wisdom, your own peculiar opinions ; and receive with meek and teachable hearts, as men who seek for light in darkness, and enquire after knowledge with a real and painful sense of ignorance ;—receive, I say, that word of faith, which the Holy Ghost will then engraft into your natures ; and which, if you will but allow it its free course, and follow humbly and diligently where it leads, is able, through the mercies of Christ, to save your souls, from death eternal.

This, as I conceive, is the true and instructive meaning of the present difficult passage : and from hence the following general truths may seem to follow. First, that it is of God’s free grace, that we are called, either to the knowledge of the Gospel, or to an effectual and lively faith in its truths. This we learn, when he tells us, that every good gift is from the Father of lights ; and that He has of His own will begotten us with the word of truth.

Secondly, that, nevertheless, this free grace is not irresistible ; that it may be rendered vain by our inattention, our self conceit, our disputations, and noisy controversy. Yea more ; that in order to make it effectual, there is much, on

our side, to be done; and that we must bring with us teachable minds and gentle tempers; in order that grace may find a proper soil to work on. Unless this were so, there would be no meaning in the caution, which follows, that every man should be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; since, if grace were irresistible, all these would be the natural and necessary effects of grace; and by no means in our power either to neglect, or to cultivate. That would be a strange mockery, if a man were to cast us from a high tower; and then bid us take care, to fall to the bottom: yet there is no difference between such a conduct, and that which the Calvinists ascribe to God, when they say, that—He first gives us grace, which effectually moves us to work His will; and then commands us to do, what we are doing, and cannot help doing already. The truth is, and it is abundantly clear, as I conceive, at once from reason, and from Scripture, that the spiritual gifts of God may be fitly compared to the blessings, which He gives to the natural world;—the rain, which causes the green blade to spring; the sun, which mellows the soil, and ripens the fruitful ear. Like the rain, and the sunshine, they are the free bounty of the Most High; and, like them, they are the great and effectual causes of the grass, which giveth food to the cattle; and the corn, which strengtheneth the

heart of man. But, like the sunshine and the rain, they still leave much for the industry of man to do ; and, as the sunshine, and the rain, will not give us bread ; unless we plough the land, and root out the weeds, and fence the field, and reap the corn, and stack, and thresh, and grind it ; so the grace, which God offers to us, can only increase our guilt and our damnation ; unless we cultivate our hearts, and weed out our evil thoughts, and shut out, so far as possible, all occasions of evil, and apply, by diligent exertion, our good principles to the purposes for which they were intended.

Thirdly, it is worth our while to notice, that it is by a diligence in learning our duty, that, in the first instance, St. James supposes, that we are to avail ourselves of God's gracious offers of salvation ; and that here, as elsewhere, He strongly discourages all religious gossip ; and, still more, all angry and disputatious tempers. " Let every man be swift to hear ; slow to speak ; slow to wrath." Now, here, I need hardly remind you of the mischief, which has been done to real Christianity, by men setting up as its teachers, not only without being called to that office by those rulers of the Church, whom Christ has appointed ; but, still more, when they have neither had the time to qualify themselves to speak on those mysteries, to do justice to which the studies, and prayers, of many years are not more

than sufficient. But, it is in the real spirit of love to such persons as these, and it is in the solemn discharge of that duty, to which these words of St. James compel me, that I would entreat them to be very sure, that they understand the Gospel, before they pretend to preach it, or dispute about it; and, in the words of the same apostle, not to be “many masters: knowing, that” such as rashly take that office on themselves “shall receive the greater damnation”—shall be judged, that is, more severely for their faults, or failings, in proportion as they have professed to be lights to others; and have attempted, by wrathful censures, or by fierce disputations, to establish what they have, perhaps, mistakingly believed to be the “righteousness of God.”

Fourthly, they may be still more led to religious prudence, in this particular, by attending to what St. James goes on to assure them,—namely, that this over forwardness and angry zeal in the service of God, is, in truth, very closely connected with sensual and worldly passions; that it, for the most part, has its spring in them; and is a token of their prevalence in the unseen and deceitful heart of man, who is thus blinded as to his true condition. This is plain by the connection of my text with the verse, which goes before it; in which, after having cautioned his disciples against the errors, which I have noticed, he, lastly, goes on to teach them,

how best to avoid those errors, namely, by cutting out of the heart itself, that carnal and worldly temper, which leads men to think highly of themselves, and of their own qualifications:—"Wherefore, laying apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, receive with meekness the engrafted word."

It is, indeed, most certain, that, where the heart is meek, the conversation will never be positive, overbearing, or censorious;—that, where the sinner is really convinced of his own necessities and ignorance, he will be always better pleased to learn from others, than himself to undertake the office of teacher:—that, where he feels his own weakness, his own sinfulness, his own total dependance on the mercies of the Most High, he will have little time, or inclination, to find fault with others; or to cherish in his breast that wrath, which worketh not the righteousness of God.

Be humble then, my brethren; be teachable; be doubtful of yourselves; and judge favourably of each other; and, that you may do all this more effectually, prepare your hearts, by prayer, and by repentance, and by a deep and unaffected lowliness, to receive that degree of Heavenly light, which God may be pleased to pour on you! Nor doubt, that the light so sought after, the truth so studied, the word so meekly received and so diligently engrafted in your hearts and memories,

will be found able to save your souls. It is God's word ;—it will not return unto Him empty of its performance ; but it shall “take root downwards, and bear fruit upwards ;” and be, to those that believe, His great power unto Salvation !

Which that we may all seek, according to His word : and all find, as His word hath promised ; may He grant to our prayers, for the sake, and through the merits, of His dear Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord !

SERMON XXVI.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ST. JAMES, i. 26.

If any man among you seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

THERE is hardly any single moral or Christian duty, which is so often, or so earnestly enforced in Scripture, as that government of the tongue, which, in these words, and in the third chapter of the same epistle, the apostle James is recommending. Yet, among all the passages, where this virtue, or its opposite vice, is spoken of, I can call none to mind, so strong, or so remarkable, as the passage, which I have chosen as the subject of my present sermon, (and which you have this morning heard from the Altar)—as taken in connection with what the same apostle afterwards subjoins :—“ If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man ; and able also to bridle the whole body.”¹ David has, indeed, very

¹ St. James, iii. 2.

often and very forcibly described the dreadful anger of the Most High against the different sins of slander, lying, reproachful and boasting language, profaneness, blasphemy, and perjury. Our Saviour has pointed out the grievous and awful judgement, by which every idle word, which men speak, is to be tried¹; and has declared, that “by his words, shall every man be justified, or condemned.”² But the assurance of St. James is, in some respects, stronger still; inasmuch as he seems to place the whole difficulty of religion, and the principal, if not the only, test of a Christian’s character, in the disciplining and taming of this unruly member. Unless the tongue be bridled,—he declares, on the one hand,—all other pretences to godliness, how great soever, go for nothing; and if the tongue be kept in proper bounds, no further proof is required, on the other hand, that its owner is a perfect Christian. “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man’s religion is vain.” And “if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.”

These strong and startling expressions are strangely at variance with the small degree of consequence, which the greater part of professed believers attach to their own idle words; or to the

¹ St. Matthew, xii. 36.

² Verse 37.

idle words of others ; inasmuch as the sins of the tongue very often abound with those, whose general lives are, by no means, marked with extraordinary impiety. Some sins there are, indeed, of this description, such as slander, uncharitable censure, and speaking against dignities, to which persons, in other respects, of the strictest outward conduct, and the highest religious pretensions, have been remarkably and fatally prone ; whom yet it would be a want of charity to suspect of being hypocrites ; or to deny that their religion, though inconsistent and imperfect, was yet, so far as it went, sincere. In order, therefore, to shew with how good reason St. James has laid this unusual stress on a single virtuous habit ; and that I may thus more effectually call your attention to the great and awful necessity of ruling your communication in all meekness, truth, and soberness, I will endeavour to explain to you, in what manner, and on what accounts, the government of the tongue is made a test of genuine Christianity : and that “ He that offendeth not in his word,” is described “ as a perfect man.”

There are four different lights, in which St. James may be supposed to have viewed the government of the tongue ; when he represented the man, who bridled its wilfulness, as “ perfect.”

First—he may have considered him, as perfect, in comparison with other men : inasmuch

as whatever other faults a man may be guilty of, yet, if he be free from some one offence, of which his neighbours are guilty, and which is in our opinion, more grievous than all the rest, his other and lesser faults are overlooked ; and become hardly worth speaking of, in consideration of his freedom from the greater enormity. Thus, if we supposed a village to exist, where all but one man were robbers and murderers ; while that one had always been strictly honest and merciful ; we should be apt to call that man a perfect character, when compared with his fraudulent and bloody neighbours : though we might discover on enquiry, that he seldom went to Church, and that he was sometimes idle, or drunken. In like manner, if it be true, that the sins of the tongue are of all others, the most common in the Christian world ; and if it be also true, that more misery is thus caused to mankind, more disgrace to religion, more offence to the great Judge and Sovereign of men and of angels, than by any other vice, which can be named ; we can well understand, how St. James, possessed with a sense of those evils, might hardly stay to notice the less frequent, less prevailing, less widely injurious offences, which arose from a different source : and might call that man comparatively perfect, (whatever sprinkling of vice, and of human infirmity, his character might in other respects display,) by whom the temptations of the

tongue were mastered. And that the sins of the tongue, both from their consequences, and from their frequency, do really answer this description, a very little consideration may serve to make you sensible. As the tongue is the most powerful engine, to the happiness of mankind, and to the glory of the Creator, which God has given to man ; so is it also the most formidable in works of mischief, and impiety. With our words, it is that we bless God ; and shew forth the praises of His wisdom, and power : but it is with our words, on the other hand, that we blaspheme and defy Him. With our words, we may indeed defend the cause of the innocent and poor ; but it is by our words, also, that we oppress and slander them ; and make the worse appear the better cause. With our words, we may give advice to the weak ; comfort to the afflicted ; reproof to the sinner ; encouragement to the righteous man ; but, with our words, we may also lead the blind astray ; and revile and insult the broken hearted ; we may flatter the sinner, in the folly of his ways ; and misrepresent, and perplex the righteous ; we may “ call evil, good ; and good, evil ”—and when we measure the vast flood of private and public misery, and of guilt, to which this single fountain gives rise ; when we hear of sinners hardened by false advice ; innocent persons ruined by false vows and pretences ; hearts broken by slanderous reports ;

tempers made fierce and brutish by unkind language ; and God provoked by daily curses, and blasphemy ; we shall not be surprised, that Job speaks of the “ scourge of the tongue,”—in the same breath, with the greatest evils, which can befall human nature—“ the famine,” “ the sword,” and “ the destruction” or “ pestilence :”¹ nor that David describes an evil tongue as full of “ the poison of asps ;” as “ cutting like a sharp sword ;” as sending “ forth the arms of the wicked, even bitter words :”²—that St. James holds it out as “ an unruly evil ; full of deadly poison ; a fire, a world of iniquity ; defiling the whole body ; and setting on fire the course of nature ; and itself set on fire by hell :” or that he should call that man perfect who “ offendeth not in his words.”³

But secondly,—such a person as is here described, if such there be,—may be called perfect, for another reason, namely, from the exceeding difficulty which there is in keeping our mouth free from transgression. He, who has mastered the greater difficulty, may well be presumed capable of contending with the less : he, who has slain Goliath, will not be afraid of a meaner champion ; a fishpool will hardly drown him, who has swum through the overflowing waves of Jordan ; and

¹ Job, v. 19—22.

² Psalm lii. 3 ; lxiv. 3.

³ St. James, iii. 5—10.

thus, if to govern the tongue be one of the hardest tasks which is laid on a Christian ; it may well be said, that, if any man “ offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle his whole body.” But we shall on enquiry into ourselves, very soon discover, that there is really no one point, in which we all of us offend so often, as this ; nor any, with which so many of our besetting and daily temptations are connected. Thus the violent man is at every moment of his life, and on every cross accident which befalls him, almost irresistibly tempted to vent his rage, either in blasphemy against God, or in abuse of his fellow creatures.—The easy and good tempered man, who fears ill will, and dislikes giving pain to any one, is led by this temper, however lovely in itself, to favour and flatter the faults and follies of those, with whom he dwells ; to make promises, which he cannot perform ; and to join in conversation, which he ought to have reprov'd by an expressive silence. The envious and malicious person is led into slander and talebearing, by a desire to do harm : the idle and thoughtless person, out of a mere love of gossip, and the pride of secret information.—The man of business is tempted to lie, by the hope of profit :—the man of pleasure, out of pure vanity. Some men fall into oaths, or indecent talk, out of an ostentation of spirit and

liveliness : others, from mere dullness, and in order by such means to be able to bear that part in conversation, of which they are, in other respects, incapable. And, thus surrounded by temptations to blasphemy, evil speaking, flattery, slander, tattling, lying, filthiness and indecent jesting, can we wonder, that so many fall into condemnation, through the sins of the tongue? or can we deny, that St. James may have rightly concluded, that he, who can keep this unruly member under controul, is much rather able to bridle all the other corruptions, to which his bodily nature is heir. Surely, “if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man; and able also to bridle the whole body!”

Thirdly—This high character may have been given by St. James to him, who is uniformly discreet in his conversation; because such self government is, perhaps, the strongest outward proof, which can be given, of an inward soundness of principle; of a constant sense of the dreadful presence of the unseen God; and a constant recollection of the laws of Jesus Christ, and of the blessed rewards and the dreadful punishments, which are to follow in another world our good or evil behaviour in this. “Out of the abundance of the heart,” saith our Lord, “the mouth speaketh; a good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things;

and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things.”¹ Speech is the child of Thought; which, after its birth, may be expected in its features to be like its parent. When we meet a stranger, we commonly require no more than an hour’s unrestrained conversation with him, to ground a judgement on his worth, or his ability. Nay, often before a man has spoken ten words, his character is caught; and we pass a formal sentence on it. It is true, there may be cases in which a hypocrite, for a certain time, and to obtain some particular end, will talk in a manner, to which his heart is a stranger. But it seldom happens, that he can do so for long together: and it almost always will be found, that, in the midst of his pretended piety, some inconsistency will appear, which proves that all is not right within him. But where, on the other hand, the conversation is lying—flattering—abusive—slandering, indecent, or blasphemous, it is but vain to flatter ourselves, that the heart within is honest, or pure, or merciful, or holy. A man who really fears deceit, will not with his lips deceive us; a man, who is really in charity with his neighbour, will not wound his feelings, or take away his good name. A man, who really is pure in heart, will not speak such things, as make innocence ashamed; and dis-

¹ St. Luke, vi. 45.

grace the name of religion. If it be urged, that men, whose hearts are generally good, do sometimes fall into these sins of the tongue; the answer is, their hearts, whatever they may usually be, are not good at the time: they are, for the moment, corrupt, and possessed by Satan. Nor can we desire a stronger proof [than this liability, even in good men, so to corrupt themselves—] to shew the justice of the sentence, passed by St. James,—that, “If any man seem to be religious, and bridle not his tongue, that man’s religion is vain:”—and “if any man offend not in word, that same is a perfect man.”

But there is yet a fourth, and a still more remarkable reason, why St. James may have affixed so high a praise on the government of the tongue:—and that is, because not only the daily and consistent practice of this virtue is a sure proof and outward token, that our hearts are inwardly right before God; but it is also certain, that, though, from former evil conversation, our hearts may be, at present, very different from that which we should desire them to be in the hour of death and in the day of judgement; yet will a careful and resolute and patient government of our words do more, under God’s grace, than any other means, which can be pointed out, to correct and purify our thoughts, and to take away from within us those fires of lust, or

pride, or malice, or impiety, which now defile and consume us.

There is hardly any inward thought, which will not, like smothered flame, burn out of itself, unless we give it vent by our words, or by our actions.—I will suppose a man to have some feeling in his heart, whether of covetousness, or of pride, or of lust, or of malice, which he knows to be offensive to God, and which he desires, but is not able, to get rid of. Let this man determine steadily to keep this wicked feeling to himself;—let him determine not so much, as in a single word, to give it vent: and mark what will follow.

In the first place, this will lead him to keep a careful watch not only over his lips; but over every thought, which passes in his heart: lest at any time these inward enemies should break forth in his conversation, when he least expects them. Not only his lips, but his fancy will be watched; and he will be obliged to regulate the last, lest he should expose himself in the former.

But secondly, if he have any conscience remaining, (which I all along suppose him to have,—since I suppose him to rule his lips, from a desire to please God) supposing his conscience not to be seared with a red hot iron, the difference, which he will find between his thoughts and expressions, cannot fail to be so

shocking to himself; and the burden of always wearing a mask will be so painful; that he will be naturally led to use his best endeavours, and to apply earnestly for the help of the Holy Ghost,—for which no man ever applies in vain,—to purify his heart, also, as well as his lips; and to take from it that inward foulness, to which he dares not lend an outward passage. Thus, by the mere beginning of ordering a man's conversation aright, we have already advanced no little way towards the general amendment of his character.

Thirdly, the man, whose language is always meek, charitable, pure, and pious, will, out of mere consistency and a sense of pure shame, be obliged to keep himself from all actions unsuitable to such discourse. The world itself would drive him out of society, as an odious hypocrite, if, after speaking like a saint, he immediately went to act as the worst of sinners; if, after declaring in words his sense of the deep wickedness of adultery, he went forth to lay snares for his neighbour's wife; if, after professing his perfect forgiveness of his enemy, he sought immediately to ruin him: if, after refusing to join in the indecent conversation of drunkards, he was found doing that, which the gravity of his conversation condemned in other men. And, trust me! it is no small advantage to any man, thus to have pledged himself on

the side of God and goodness ; so that his worldly sense of consistency may be joined with his fear of the invisible Judge of the world ; to drive him from open transgression.

But, fourthly, such is the mutual dependance of our thoughts on our outward conduct, as well as of our outward conduct on our thoughts, — that it almost always happens, that a man really becomes that character inwardly, which he long and steadily frames his speech and actions to resemble.— Mocking is catching, in a good as well as in a bad sense ; and he, whose talk is always pure, and godly, and charitable, will find, by degrees, his heart becoming pure, and godly, and charitable also. Our thoughts are in fact fed by our conversation ; we meditate, almost necessarily, most on that, which is most in our mouths and ears ; and though there may be some lamentable instances to the contrary, it is generally to be expected, that he, who is resolute never to say anything unworthy of a Christian, will by degrees begin to have few thoughts, which a Christian might not confess without blushing. The reason why this is not the case with hypocrites, is that the hypocrite is not sufficiently consistent ; nor sufficiently persevering in his imitation of holiness. He only acts the part of a pious man in public ; and where he has some point to gain. Where he has no worldly end in view, his conversation is

as worldly, as uncharitable, as indecent, as those whom he affects to condemn, or pity. Nor is this all; in one respect the hypocrite is so far from governing his tongue, that the greater part of his life is spent in lying and flattery. If without relaxing the gravity of his communication, he paid an equal attention to its honesty, he indeed would be no longer a hypocrite: but he would soon become, what he desires to be thought, “A perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.”

I have now shewn the different reasons, why St. James bestows this high commendation on the government of the tongue; that, namely, the mischiefs are so great, which arise from its abuse, and the difficulty so great of keeping it within proper bounds, that, where the tongue is duly kept in order, we may generally and reasonably suppose the heart to be pure and holy; and that no better way can be found of making our hearts such as God requires, than by a diligent care to be, in our daily conversation, such men as He approves of. And from these truths the consequences will follow:— that, if you fear to blaspheme your Maker, to injure your neighbour, or to defile and destroy your own immortal souls, be watchful over every word, which you speak; for by your words more mischief may be done, than either your head, or your hand, can, by any other means accomplish. If you are

sensible of your own weakness under temptation, and that, when sin besets you, you are but too prone to fall; be watchful over your tongues: for it is here that you are in the most constant danger. If you desire to receive from the Judge of all men the praise of His faithful servants; be watchful over every idle word, which comes from your mouths: for “by thy words, thou shalt be justified; and by thy words, thou shalt be condemned.” If, lastly, you mourn over your own inward corruption, and are but too painfully sensible, that the thoughts of your heart are vanity and wickedness; be the more careful to set a guard over the door of your lips; and to frame your discourse such, as God approves: knowing, that the man will, by degrees, become such, as his communication has long continued to be.—And that all these endeavours may prosper to your eternal salvation, forget not, day and night, to pour out your earnest prayer;—“that the words of your mouth, and the meditation of your heart, may be always acceptable in His sight, who is your God, your Strength, and your Redeemer.”

SERMON XXVII.

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION DAY.

PART I.

I ST. PETER, iv. 8.

Charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

AMONG the many excellent things, which are spoken of charity, in Scripture, the present assurance is, in several respects, the most remarkable.—It is remarkable for the disputes, to which it has given rise; and for the very different meanings, which have been affixed to it: and, as there are few texts which, when rightly understood, are more abundant in instruction, and in comfort, to the humble Christian; so there is none, of which the ignorant and sensual have so frequently taken hold,—in wresting the Scriptures to their own destruction. To some, it has been made a direct encouragement to sin; as pointing out—what they supposed to be—an easy way of delivering themselves from punishment.—By others, it has been perverted into a deadly source of pride, and of confidence

in their own good deeds,—not only for pardon, but for recompense.—To many, it has, I fear, been fatal ; as withdrawing their attention and trust from the single expiation and atonement, which is appointed for man, in the blood, the merits, and the intercession, of Jesus Christ, our Lord. How these mistakes arose, and how they may be best avoided, will appear in the course of my present sermon ; in which I purpose, with God’s help,—to explain the real meaning of the words before us, and the practical consequences, which we are, as Christians, bound to draw from them.

There are two ways, in which the words of St. Peter have been understood by different interpreters : and the grounds of their dispute are reducible to the questions :—“ Whose faults are they which our charity is said to conceal,—and from whom are they thus hidden ? Are they the faults of other men, or our own ? Are they hidden from our own recollection, and from the notice of the world ? or are they covered from the wrath, and the fearful sentence, of The Almighty ?” These are the questions, which naturally arise from the consideration of the text, which has been read to you : and to these, the following answers have been given by the defenders of the one, and of the other, interpretation.

They, who suppose that the faults here intended, are the faults of other men, understand

St. Peter to be doing no more, in his present words, than exhorting the members of the Christian church to a charitable forbearance and tenderness, one towards another; by which every man may, undoubtedly be, in a certain sense, asserted to hide the faults of his neighbour, both from his own observation, and from the observation of the world: — inasmuch as the charitable and kind-hearted man is in himself disposed to “think no evil;” and to shut his eyes, so far as is possible, to the faults and follies of his brethren: and is still more anxious, even when he himself cannot avoid observing them, to conceal them (by all fair constructions and decent apologies, or, at all events, by a kind and friendly silence) from the observation, and reprobation, of the world. And to prove that the expression of “covering sins” is very capable of this explanation, they bring forward the words of Solomon; (Prov. x. 12) to which they suppose the present passage to be an allusion; — and in which it is observed that — “Hatred stirreth up strifes; but Love covereth all sins.”

There is yet another way, in which a charitable man, they tell us, may be said to *cover* the sin of his neighbour: and that is, by obtaining forgiveness for it through his loving and charitable prayers in his behalf; and by leading him to a true repentance of it, through his gentle dealing, his patient teaching, and endurance;

and by that tender care for his brother's soul, which is one of the most necessary parts of charity: and by which "he, who turneth a sinner from the evil of his ways," is said by St. James, in the last verse of his Epistle, to "hide a multitude of sins."—Not, say they, that the sins of the teacher himself were necessarily thus numerous; but that the transgressions of "the soul which he has saved from death" are hidden, by this conversion, from Almighty Vengeance.

And thus, beyond a doubt, a very useful lesson is conveyed; and a duty, recommended to the practice of the Church; which it well became the Apostle to recommend; and the Church, in every age, to practise. But this explanation, it may be thought, neither suits the tenour of St. Peter's argument, nor the awful circumstances under which his counsel is brought forwards.—He had begun by telling us, that the "end of all things" was drawing near. In consequence of this alarming prospect, he had exhorted us, "therefore" to be "sober, and watch unto prayer." Then, for the same cause, he urges, with yet greater earnestness: "above all things, have fervent charity among yourselves;"—as an additional motive to the practice of which, and still, as it may seem, with an eye to the approaching terrors of Christ's coming to judge the world, he assures us, that this "charity

shall cover the multitude of sins.”—Surely something more is here intended, than the assurance of that, which nobody ever questioned; namely, that a kind and charitable man overlooks, and conceals, as far as possible, the faults of his guilty neighbour.

Whether an allusion is, in these words, designed to the words of Solomon already mentioned, is a point, which must always be doubtful. But even, if we should grant that this was the case, it would by no means follow, that the words, as they stand in St. Peter’s Epistle, are to be understood, in exactly the same sense, as that which they bear in the 10th chapter of Proverbs: since nothing is more common, than the accommodation, in the New Testament, of passages taken from the Old,—to a sense very different from their former meaning; and generally more exalted, more spiritual, and more mysterious.

Nor can we fail to observe, that the other way, in which the charitable man is supposed to cover his neighbour’s faults, by converting him, that is, from the error of his ways, can scarcely be the thing here intended; inasmuch as the charity here mentioned, as that, by which a multitude of sins may be covered, is not said to be exerted by the good, towards the wicked; by the Christians, towards the Heathen; but by the Christians,—those who are already converted,—to-

wards each other. “Above all things, have fervent charity among yourselves; for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.”

It is true, indeed, that, as Christians may, and do sin, notwithstanding their conversion; so charity may be fully exerted among ourselves, in exhorting each other to holiness; in reproving each other's sins; and, by our zeal and our prayers, pleading for each other at the throne of grace; but still, if this had been the apostle's meaning, it is almost impossible to suppose, that he would not have explained himself further; or that he would not have at once exhorted us to labour, by these charitable offices, for the salvation of our brethren. It should seem, then, that there are great difficulties, in supposing, that, by the sins, which are to be covered by our charity, the sins of other people are, in this place, intended: and it is possible, that this opinion would never have been resorted to, by the learned men, who maintain it; if it had not been for the grievous abuses, of which I shall speak presently, to which the other interpretation has been exposed, and which made them fly too hastily from the plain and obvious sense of Scripture,—in order to avoid that misapplication, for which, not the truth itself, but the sins of those, by whom that truth is perverted, may be justly considered as answerable.

The second way of explaining the present

passage of Scripture is their's, who suppose, that the sins here intended are not the sins of others, but of the charitable person himself: and who understand the doctrine thus conveyed, — as teaching us, [what we are taught in many other places, by all the writers of the New Testament,] that true love and charity towards the brethren is an offering so acceptable in the sight of God, that, where this is found, our sins will, undoubtedly, be, through Christ's merits pardoned: and, where this is not found, the pardon, which Christ has bought by His blood, can by no means be expected to extend to us.—It need not, nay, it must not be fancied, that either this, or any other action, or habit, can have a positive value in God's sight; as that, which, of itself, can cover sins; or purchase pardon for them.—This is the consequence of Christ's blood, and of His merits only. But still, our love for the brethren, and our kindness to them, when founded in love to God; and when expressive of our love to Him, and of our faith in His Son's mediation; — both may be, and undoubtedly are, the principal means by which we are enjoined to seek, — and by which only we can hope to receive or obtain, — the salvation, which Christ has procured for those, and those only, who apply for it in the appointed manner.

I will endeavour to explain myself. — Supposing an insolvent debtor receives, from some

generous benefactor, the promise of a sum of money — sufficient to supply all his wants ; — which he is directed to apply for, in a certain street, and on a certain day ; it might be said, indeed, in one particular sense, that the debtor could not have paid his debts, without walking to such a street, and enquiring in such a house ; and that, therefore, it was by this walk, that the debts were discharged ; but no one would, [if he were asked who paid the debts,] answer — the debtor himself paid them — since the means of payment were furnished by another person ; and since the action, which the debtor was enjoined to perform, in order to obtain those means, [the walking, namely, to such a street, and to such a house,] had, in itself, no power whatever to discharge a single penny ; any further, than as it was received by the free goodness of his friend, as expressive of his wants, and of his thankfulness. By the strict application of this case to ourselves, and to our hopes of salvation, we may find, first,—that, though Christ's merits, and sufferings only, redeem us from death and hell ; yet, in order to profit by those heavenly merits, certain appointed actions, and habits, of our own are necessary : and that, therefore, it may be said of us, that we are, in a certain sense, saved by our faith, by our hope, and, as in the present instance, by our charity ; inasmuch as these are the means whereby we lay hold on the pro-

mise ; and plead with God the payment of our debt, in the person of the Lord Jesus.—But it is not by these alone, nor by any merit, or power, which these have, in themselves, that we are saved from death, and misery ; since the advantages given to us by Christ are such, as no possible exertions of our own could have any chance of obtaining : and since, in fact, there is no more necessary connection between our faith, our hope, and our charity,—and the pardon and happiness, which God, for His Son's sake, bestows on us ; than there is between knocking at a door, and receiving a purse of money.

Charity, then, may cover sins, in the same manner, as that, in which faith covers, or obtains a pardon for them ; not that our imperfect and unsteady love, or faith, can claim, of themselves, either reward, or pardon, from our judge : but because these are the means, by which that blessed judge has taught us to seek for the pardon, and the reward ; which his own sufferings have brought for us :—and which his own merits have claimed, on our behalf, from his Father.

And that charity has this power, as an appointed means of salvation ; nay, that it is the means by which, above all others, and even more than faith itself, our salvation is to be sought for, is plain, from many positive assurances of Scripture ; in which our love for others is spoken of, not only as a condition, without which we

must not hope for pardon; but as a pledge, whereby we may assure ourselves, when we really feel it in our hearts, that our iniquities are forgiven; and our sins, covered. Thus the love of one another, which is nothing else than another word for charity, is said by St. Paul “to fulfil the Law¹;” that is, to free us from the punishment, which a transgression of the law brings down upon us.—The same love is repeatedly said, by St. John, to be a sure and certain mark, that he, who feels it, is in a state of grace and favour with God; and that he is an heir of everlasting life.—Thus,—“He, that loveth his brother, abideth in the light.”²—“If we love one another, God dwelleth in us.”³—“We know, that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.”⁴—“Every one, that loveth, is born of God.”⁵

Nor are these expressions, forcible as they are, the strongest which may be found, to the same effect, in Scripture. Forgiveness of our enemies, which is a known and necessary part of charity, is particularized by our Saviour, in His comment on the prayer, which He taught us; as availing, through His mercies, to obtain forgiveness of our sins from God. “If ye forgive men their tres-

¹ Romans, xiii. 8.

² 1 St. John, ii. 10.

³ 1 St. John, iv. 12.

⁴ 1 St. John, iii. 14.

⁵ 1 St. John, iv. 7.

passes, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”¹ And in that blessed and heaven-taught prayer, we are encouraged actually to plead that our imperfect and feeble love, as an argument for mercy from the bountiful Father of all men; —when we cry out, in the words of His son:—
“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them, that trespass against us.”

Charity, then, or love towards our neighbour, as expressive of our love towards God, and as an appointed means of applying for His promised mercies, may be said with sufficient accuracy to *cover*, or *hide*, our sins from God’s wrath: inasmuch as He is by this means induced to overlook, and to pardon them. Nor can a more blessed and comfortable doctrine be conceived, —[to all those who, while they hunger and thirst after righteousness, are weighed down by the sense of their manifold imperfections,] than the assurance, that the love, which they feel within themselves, is an argument of God’s presence with them: that His strength will be made perfect in their utter weakness; that, however they may fall short of that glorious pattern, whom they strive to imitate; —yet, if they love the brethren, they may be assured — by that token — that they have passed from death unto life; and that where fervent charity abounds,—

¹ St. Matthew, vi. 14.

though many faults, and failings, may cling to the soul, and defile it; — yet shall those faults be covered from the eyes of Him, who forgives all things to those, that love Him much; and who receives, and requires, at our hands no other testimony of our love to Himself, than that we shew kindness to these His little ones.—Well are they, who feel, within their hearts, this holy flame; which shall shine forth, at last, into perfect brightness, and everlasting glory.—Well is it with him, who shews forth, by his charity to his brethren, the faith which worketh by love; and that power of God, of which the strength and blessedness is displayed, in this world, by the softening of his heart, and by the conquest of his unruly passions; — and will be displayed, in the world to come, by the crown of glory given to him.— But, let him beware of self-deceit.—There are many counterfeits of these gracious feelings; and many have made shipwreck of their souls, by not rightly understanding the whole meaning of the word, charity: — and by neglecting to form the habit of brotherly affection in their hearts, by the only process, through which the genuine habit can be formed there, — namely, a love of God, which springs, as from a root, from faith in Jesus Christ; and which brings forth, as its natural fruit, the principle, and the consequent actions, of love for all God's children.

These cautions, however, will require a longer time to set them forth, at the length which their exceeding importance requires; and I must defer them to another occasion. Let it be sufficient, in the mean time, to warn you, that, nothing, which does not spring from faith in Jesus Christ, can be accepted, as charity before God: that, where pride enters in, no genuine love of God, or of man, can be found: that, as charity is a grace which comes from God, it must be sought of Him, like all His other gifts, by fervent prayer, and by a diligent use of the sacraments: and that to whatever degree of warmth or activity our benevolence is carried, we must refer it all to the Giver of every good and perfect gift; who maketh men to be of one mind in a house; and hath appointed His creatures to be mutually helpful one to another, even as Christ His Son helped all; when all things were, without Him, helpless.

SERMON XXVIII.

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION DAY.

PART II.

I ST. PETER, iv. 8.

Charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

IN my last sermon, on these words of Scripture, I endeavoured to explain the manner, in which the grace of charity is said to cover sin ;— namely, that our love for our neighbour, as expressive of our love towards God, and as an appointed means of applying for His mercies promised in Jesus Christ, may be said, with truth, to hide our sins from God's wrath : inasmuch as He is, by this means, induced to overlook and pardon them.— Not that this love, however manifested, can itself merit any thing from God ; but that God accepts it from us, as a token of our acceptance of that covenant of grace, through which alone our pardon is obtained and sealed in Heaven. And as, where charity is wanting, this pardon will not be given ; so, where true charity is found, we are sure, it will not be withheld ;

but that the single fact of our love for our fellow creatures is, of itself, a sign, that we are in a state of grace with the Almighty. "Hereby," saith St. John, "hereby we know, that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."¹

But, though by thus insisting on the plain and literal meaning of the text, I set forth, in the strongest manner, the inestimable value of that charity which covereth sin; I do not conceal from you the danger of mistaking the nature of real charity, and the dreadful consequences, to which such a mistake may lead. I now, in pursuance of my promise, shall proceed to shew the nature of these mistakes, and the causes from which they spring. And this may be done, most effectually, by shewing, first, wherein true charity consists; as it is plainly set forth in Holy Scripture.

Charity, then, is nothing else than a Latin word which means love, or fondness: and the habit of charity, or love, as applied to all God's creatures, and above all, to our fellow Christians, must consist of two parts, an inward good will to them; and such outward actions, as are suitable to this inward feeling, and expressive of it. Both these are necessary parts of charity; and unless both are found together, our charity can by no

¹ 1 St. John, iii. 14.

means deserve the name. If faith, without works, be dead; love, without works, must, beyond a doubt, be equally so: and, however we might pretend to love our neighbours in our hearts, to wish them well, and to desire their happiness; yet no one would be so simple as to think us charitable, on this account alone: nor would any body believe, that we had any such feeling in our hearts; unless our actions, and outward behaviour, afforded some proof, that it was there. Nor is it man only, who is thus accustomed to judge concerning us. The Searcher of hearts has Himself declared, that the judgment thus formed is true, when He has taught us, that, if a man see his brother want, and do not relieve him, the love of God cannot dwell within him.

But though neither God, nor our neighbour, are deceived by such a pretence; our own souls are, unhappily, too often thus imposed upon. We are apt to lay great stress on our general good will, our harmlessness, our kind words, our charitable wishes; while we, in reality, take no trouble, and go to as little expence as possible, for the advantage of those, towards whom we profess to feel so tenderly. And is this enough to cover the multitude of sins? Is this a claim to Heaven? Does not, on the contrary, this very tenderness of ours, supposing it real, condemn, [our ownselves being judges,] our own

idleness, or neglect, or covetousness ; since it is clear, that we feel not the extent of the distress, which we take no steps to relieve : and that our hatred to trouble, or our love of money, are so strong, as to overpower in our hearts a naturally affectionate temper. We hate the man, in the parable, who passed by on the other side ; when he saw afar off the wounded and naked passenger : we hate him worse, who came, and looked on him ; who felt the extent of his pitiable condition ; who saw his wounds, his tears, and wretchedness ; and who then went on, and left him. But what should we say, if this man had been the sufferer's friend, or brother ? What, if he really were sorry for his misfortune, and loved him ; and yet forsook him ? Should we not then cry out, still more loudly, against that hateful idleness, or covetousness, which could lead him to prefer his ease, or his money, to the life of him, who was most dear to him ? And is not, in like manner, our neglect, of such as want our help, rendered more criminal, in exact proportion to the natural gentleness of our nature, and to the degree, in which we are affected by the consideration of their distress, or danger ? Let all such as boast of their own tenderness in acts of mercy and kindness, remember, that it is not by what men have *felt*, but by what they have *done*, for their brethren, that our Lord, at His second coming, will pronounce them blessed, or cursed !

But what is to become of those who have no means or opportunity, to shew forth their inward feeling? I answer, none can be found, who are thus completely debarred from means, or opportunity. They, who cannot give money, food, or physic, to a suffering neighbour, may yet give them their attendance in sickness, their comfort in distress, their advice under temptation, their prayers in all calamity. They, who cannot relieve all who apply, may still do their best to discover the real sufferers: they, who have themselves nothing to give, may recommend such to the bounty of others: and God only knows how much of that good which is done in the world, is done by those who have, to all appearance, least in their power.

Our charity, then, must be shewn, in our actions; as well as felt, in our hearts.

But, secondly, it is not enough that we are outwardly bountiful, and useful; unless these actions proceed from a right principle. There are too many, who suppose, that, when the outward action is good, it is unnecessary to examine further: and that he, who does good to others, is certainly charitable, be his motives what they may. Now, as a general rule in judging of other men, this method is, to a certain extent, a proper one: or, to speak more correctly, as we cannot know the secret motives of our neighbours, we are bound, in love for him, to hope,

that his good deeds proceed from the right principle. But, as applied to ourselves, or wherever the motive can be known, this way of judging is, plainly, always insufficient ; and as plainly, often untrue ; because there are many actions, of which the character entirely differs, according to circumstances, and to the reason, for which they are done. Thus, to pay money for the use of the poor, is, beyond all doubt, an action which is, in many cases extremely charitable : but to pay money for the same purpose, when compelled by a parish rate, is very necessary, and very proper ; but we none of us pretend to call it *charity*. It must, in fact, to make it charitable, be done with a good will ; it must be our own free act ; and it must proceed from love to the sufferers, and from a desire to do them good. Again, to nurse the sick, and comfort the dying, is most kind and charitable : but to do this, in expectation of a legacy, is no charity at all ; inasmuch as our attentions are, in such a case, not given, but sold. In like manner, if a man give alms to a beggar, not from pity, but because the beggar cries after him, and he is anxious to get rid of his importunity : if he put down his name to a subscription, not from a desire to do good, but because he is ashamed to give less than others, or in order to magnify his own riches, or goodness, it is plain, that, though the poor may be benefited by his money, his

own sins are not covered; and he can lay no claim whatever to the inward grace of charity.

And this will explain, how St. Paul, when reckoning up almost all the outward actions of bounty, and of self-denial, by which charity is usually shewn, declares, at the same time, that “without charity, these profit us nothing:” because, though charity which, as we have seen, is nothing else than love, must necessarily bring forth these fruits,—yet these fruits, or something like them, may grow on another stem. And nothing could have greater power to lower our own opinion of ourselves, than a careful examination of what were our real desires, and intentions, in those actions, which pass with the world for good works; and a consideration, how few of these can really be said to arise from faith in Christ, or from real affection for our fellow creatures. We should thus find our claim of merit reduced at once to something less than nothingness: and that many of our fairest actions have need, not of reward, but of pardon.

Thirdly, however, our charity must be also consistent and uniform; there are many, who are content to shew their charity in one way only, and no more; who are willing to give money to the poor, but will not give up any time, or attention, to their distress; who are kind to the bodies, but not to the souls, of those

around them ; or who care not what pain they may inflict, or what mischief they may occasion by their pride, their profligacy, their violent passions, or their bad examples ; provided they are not miserly, or hard in their bargains, or to their debtors. There are others, on the contrary, who are unwilling to give their money ; and who yet suppose, that they acquit themselves of this important duty, by kind words ; by civil behaviour ; by readiness to do such little services, as require time or attention only ; and by being useful in every way, by which their purse is not encroached on. Both these sorts of men have evidently formed an imperfect notion of that virtue, to the praise of which they lay claim ; and which, as we have seen, is neither more nor less than real love and tenderness towards our fellow creatures. We should not say, that this father loved his child ; that husband, his wife ; that neighbour, his friend ; who, though he might not refuse them food, when they were hungry, made their lives bitter in every other respect, by bad language, by pride, or by cruelty : and we should still less allow, that he was excused from feeding and helping them when necessary, for the sake of a few fair words, and occasional civilities. In like manner, unless we shew our love towards our neighbour, both in word, and in deed, to the best of our ability, we cannot be said to love our

neighbour, as ourselves ;—nor to possess, in any tolerable degree, that charity, which covers a multitude of sins.

Nor is this all ;—for as we are called on to love our neighbour's soul, as well, or to speak more properly, to love his soul in a far greater degree than his perishing body ; so are we bound to use all the means in our power to instruct him, in the knowledge, and to keep him in the practice, of his duty : and we are still more bound to abstain, in our own practice, from all such actions as are likely to be of bad example to him ; and to lead him into sin, or sorrow. Even where an action, which is innocent in our own case, has a tendency to wound our brother's conscience ; we are bound by charity to abstain from it : in the same manner, that St. Paul declared his readiness to live on herbs only, rather than offend those superstitious, though well meaning Jews, who would not eat meat prepared by the Gentiles.¹ How much more, then, are we obliged, not only for our own sakes, but for the sake of those around us, to keep ourselves pure from those open sins, the infection of which causes mischief far and wide ; and to tremble, lest the soul, for which Christ died, should perish, by imitating our oaths, our extravagance, our uncleanness, our profane and ungodly con-

¹ 1 Cor. x.

versation. Vainly do we hope, that our own sins shall be covered; when we thus make the sins of others to increase, and become more perilous!

Fourthly, our charity must not be partial to a few; and cold, to all the rest of the world. It is to be love of mankind,—it is to be a desire and resolution to serve all men, or any man, whom it may be in our power to relieve; and who may need our assistance. And it must extend not only to our friends, but to strangers; not only to strangers, but to enemies. There are those, who are ready to ask, what is such or such, a person to me? Why am I to do any thing for him? Now, this is not the question to be asked; the question is,—is he a proper object of pity; and is it in my power to assist him?—If our hearts answer *yes*; then let us lose no time in fulfilling their dictates; though he be as much a stranger to us, as the wounded Jew was to the good Samaritan; or though his whole life have been passed in unceasing hatred towards us. “If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink,”¹—knowing that, while we also were enemies to God, Christ died for us: and that the forgiveness, which His blood has purchased for us, He has authorized us to ask for in our daily prayers, on the condition only, that we,

¹ Romans, xii. 20.

at the same time, forgive those who have trespassed against us.

Fifthly, our love — to be perfect — must extend to our thoughts. Charity is not puffed up with a high opinion of itself; envieth not the prosperity of others; thinketh no evil concerning them; hopeth all things, and believeth all things, in their favour. All these are necessary parts of love. For we cannot love those persons whom we despise: we cannot love those, whom we are grieved to see prosperous: we cannot love those, of whom we are suspicious. We must learn, then, to think, as well as to speak, respectfully of our neighbour; to rejoice, that he is happy, even when we do not partake in his good fortune; or when he has got, what we desire in vain; to put a favourable construction on his words, and actions; and not only to speak, but to judge, as favourably as possible, concerning his heart, and principles.

Here, however, a distinction is to be made. There is a false kind of charity too apt to pass current with a careless world; and which, under the name of judging favourably concerning our neighbour's spiritual state, and hoping all things in his favour, glosses over a total disregard of his soul and character, and a cruel carelessness as to all which he may do in this world, or may suffer in the next. We see our neighbour ruining his health by drunkenness; his property, by extra-

vagance and pride ; his credit, by dishonesty, or covetousness ; and his soul, by any or all of these : and if we tell him of his danger, if, by a timely warning we seek to snatch him from the misery before him, how often are we accused of want of charity in our judgement concerning him. Yet who is, in this case, uncharitable ? Our brother is dangerously sick ; he does not know his peril, and takes no means towards his recovery ; and who is uncharitable ? or who is the real friend ? The man who bids him be at ease ; to go on as he chooses ; and not to heed the consequences ;—or the man, who takes on himself the unpleasant office of adviser ; who calls on him to think betimes of his own preservation from ruin ; and who points out to him the true, though painful, method of recovering his health and happiness ? Be sure, then, that, though charity may, in some degree, gloss over our neighbour's faults, it cannot, if it be real, blind us to his evident danger : and to inform and admonish him is often, under such circumstances, the greatest act of charity in our power ; as it is, almost always, the most painful to ourselves, which we can be called on to practise.

I have now gone through the leading circumstances of life and behaviour, in which a genuine charity will be found to display itself ; and of which, if we find on due inquiry, the traces in our own hearts, and consciences, we may lay

claim, in humble hope, to those blessed privileges and expectations; to which, as I have shewn, in my former sermon, the lover of God and man is heir.

It now remains, that I should add some short directions, as to the best manner of producing, by God's help, this heavenly flame in our hearts; and of preserving it against the many temptations, to which, in a mortal state, it must be liable.

And here, in the first place, no means are so powerful, to make us really benevolent towards our fellow creatures, as a frequent contemplation of the goodness and mercy of God,—as exhibited towards all His creatures in their creation and nourishment; and to men, more particularly, in His inestimable love, through His Son Jesus Christ, and in the means of grace, and in the hopes of glory, which He has thus bestowed on us. This will operate, in two ways, to make us loving and charitable. In the first place, it is almost impossible to contemplate, for any long time together, a pattern of matchless goodness and beauty, without both desiring and endeavouring, in some degree, to resemble it;—and secondly, when we consider, that the only way in our power of shewing our thankfulness to God, and the only way in which God has commanded us to shew it, is by acts of kindness and mercy to our fellow creatures, it will be almost

impossible for us to cherish any harsh or unchristian feelings towards those, whom our Great Benefactor has valued so highly, and loved so tenderly.

Another practice, which is highly necessary to guard us against want of charity, either in thought, word, or deed, is, to examine, frequently, our own hearts in private ; and to possess our souls with a due consideration of our own manifold offences against God, and against our neighbour ; and of the many circumstances, which lessen the merit of those, which seem our best actions. We shall thus be led, by an almost natural process, to apply to the conduct of other men the same candid and favourable judgement, which we desire, in our own case, to be employed : and the very habit of self-examination, which is naturally produced by self-accusation, will make us more thoroughly aware of the palliative circumstances which may be urged for every human error. And thus will our charity be guarded against those two greatest temptations, to which it is liable ;—a knowledge of the wretchedness of men, and an experience of their ingratitude. By keeping our attention fixed on the ten thousand talents, which we owe to God, we shall leave ourselves no time to be too mindful of the trifling offences of our brethren against us ; and as we shall be ready to do good, not hoping for any earthly return, so we shall not be

disappointed, when no earthly return is made to us.

Thirdly, however, all these good feelings, and good principles, will soon perish and fade away within us ; unless we bring them, into constant application, by acts of daily kindness ; by acquainting ourselves with the wants, and distresses, of our neighbours ; and, above all, by denying ourselves some portion of our own comforts and pleasures, for their sake, and in order to their assistance. Not only, are services produced by love ; but love itself is yet more certainly produced by acts of kindness and attention. We are always, for the time, well disposed towards those whom we assist. Our interest becomes joined to theirs ; and we rejoice in their happiness, because it is, in some measure, our own work and contrivance. And, accordingly, the more we labour in doing good, the more really kind will our tempers become ; and we shall do good, with the greater readiness.

But, lastly, since the practice of charity, as we have seen, contains within itself so wide a range of duty and behaviour ; since it requires, to be perfect, so entire a conquest of some of our strongest natural passions, of our pride, our anger, our idleness, our love of money, and our love of pleasure, how necessary is it to begin, and to accompany, all these endeavours, with unfeigned and earnest prayer to the Almighty

author of all good gifts,—that His grace may strengthen our weakness, to those acts of self-denial which surpass our powers ; and that He would pour into our hearts, not only that faith which is the foundation of all other virtues, but that love, which is their ornament, and crown,—that blessed gift of charity, without which whosoever liveth, is counted dead before Him !

SERMON XXIX.

WHITSUNDAY.

ROMANS, viii. 14.

As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

IN the earlier days of Christ's kingdom upon earth, and while the gifts of the Holy Ghost were visible and miraculous, the descent of that Almighty Spirit, under the likeness of a flame of fire, upon the heads of the newly baptized, together with the power of speaking in strange tongues, which followed this sacred unction, was a common and unanswerable argument, both with Jews, and with Heathens, in proof of the truth of our Christian religion; and of the acceptance, and admission, of the Gentiles to the same peace and pardon, which our Saviour had, during His abode on earth, proclaimed to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.

After baptism, the new convert was conducted to some one of the apostles; or, during their absence, to some one of the bishops whom

they had appointed ; who laid his hands on his head ; and having prayed, that he might receive the Holy Ghost, the same likeness of cloven flames of fire, which had, on the day of Pentecost, shed its influence on the apostles, now fell on their followers ; and the same power of speaking with unknown tongues was conferred on the most ignorant among them.

These marvellous and blessed privileges were intended, during their continuance among men, to answer three specific ends ; and when those ends were answered, God, who never, without a worthy cause, violates what He has appointed as the course of nature, was pleased, by little and little, to withdraw them from His Church. They were, first, both useful and necessary,—to shew the truth of the Christian religion ; and to prove, that the apostles, while they spake, to the Jews, of the resurrection of their Crucified Master, were not uttering the dreams of enthusiasm, or cunningly devised fables ; but the words of truth and soberness, confirmed by God Himself. Thus, when the Apostles, first after the death of Christ, and on the day of Pentecost, displayed in no fewer than seventeen languages, the wonders of God to the people, there were added that same day to the Church as many as three thousand souls¹ ; and in the town of

¹ Acts, ii. 41.

Samaria, afterwards, even their most obstinate opposer, Simon, from beholding the miracles, which they did, believed on their word; and was baptized.¹

But, secondly, these miraculous powers were also a proof, contrary to the uncharitable pretences of the Jews, that the Gentiles, who were uncircumcised, and not subject to the law of Moses, were, nevertheless, partakers in the pardon, and the peace, which the blood of Christ had purchased. Thus, in the case of Cornelius and his family, in order to remove any scruples which might still have remained on St. Peter's mind, as to the admissibility of the Gentiles to the Church, the Almighty was pleased to shed forth His Spirit; not, as it usually was dispensed, *after* baptism; but *before* water had ye been brought: thereby to prove, by an unanswerable argument, that the outward token of regeneration by water was not to be denied to those, whom God himself had regenerated by the baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire. And St. Peter, accordingly, urged on his Jewish companions this miracle, as a proof of the acceptance of the Gentiles; asking, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost, even as

¹ Acts, viii. 13.

we ourselves received it?"¹ And St. Paul, in his epistle to the Galatians, and when he is reproving these last for their folly, in desiring to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses, reminds them, how unnecessary such further ceremonies must be to them, whose uncircumcised faith had been already accepted by God; and that acceptance, made manifest by the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Thirdly, as the first Christians were exposed to many and peculiar temptations and dangers, it was necessary, perhaps, to cheer and support their fainting spirits, under the bloody trials, which awaited them, by some more visible assurance of God's favour, some undoubted token of His protection, which might teach them, that God, in the midst of all their distresses, would never leave them nor forsake them; and that He would not suffer them to be tempted, above what they were able to bear; but would, with the temptation, also make a way for them to escape.

It is in this last way, that, in the present passage, St. Paul avails himself of the argument drawn from the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. To explain his purport, it will be necessary to carry back your attention to the latter part of the seventh chapter of the same epistle; in

¹ Acts, x. 47; xi. 15—17.

which he was setting forth, in very beautiful and powerful language, the weak and helpless condition of mankind by nature, and our inability to subdue by any strength of our own, the passions and propensities of our corrupt, and frail bodies. He had there laid down a general principle, of the truth of which, whatever increased experience we obtain of human nature, will more and more convince us; that, though the reasonable soul of man is not incapable of discerning the beauty and advantage of holiness,—yet that, without some further and more powerful help than reason, the earthly tabernacle, with its natural lusts and cravings, will always press down and overpower the best struggles of the spirit, which it contains, and imprisons:—the condition of which is so much the more miserable; inasmuch as its better understanding sees, and feels, the danger, which its feeble resolution gives it no power of avoiding. There is another law in our members, contrary to that law which is in our minds: and those only, who have felt the impossibility of getting rid of this body of death, to which we are fastened, can sufficiently appreciate the greatness of the deliverance, which has been wrought for us by Jesus Christ our Lord.

But, by the death of Christ, not only have our past offences obtained a pardon; but our future conduct has received a guide: our feeble resolu-

tions are strengthened, by spiritual help : and these miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, St. Paul might say, which ye possess and witness, are an evidence, that God has called you from the world ; and that your endeavours, if you do endeavour to walk worthy of such high calling, will not be in vain. “ We therefore,” he proceeds, in the same strain of reasoning, “ are no longer debtors to the flesh,” no longer under bondage to it ; we can, and if we hope to be saved, we must, exert the power which is given us, to conquer and mortify the flesh. And both our duty, and our ability to do so, are plain from the circumstance, that our spiritual gifts prove us to stand high in God’s favour ; and to be received as His adopted Sons, by which title we call Him not Master, but Father. The Spirit, which we feel in us, proves to our own consciences, that God has adopted us as children ; and if we are children, we have good reason for hope and joy in the midst of our present distresses and temptations, since the name of “ children of God ” in itself implies, that we are God’s heirs, and coheirs with Christ ; with whom we now inherit the sufferings of this world ; and with whom also, if we pass through these sufferings, faithfully, we shall inherit eternal and everlasting glory.

I have now given the meaning of the passage, as it applied to the Christians, who were the

apostle's immediate hearers ; but lest it should seem to any, that we ourselves, who have no such miraculous gifts, as evidences of our calling, are, therefore, unconcerned in the lesson, which he addresses to us all, I shall now proceed to examine, what grounds of assurance, or of comfort, the influence of the Spirit accords to modern Christians ; and what duties such assurance and consolation impose on those, who possess them.

The best ground of comfort, and confidence, which a man can feel, that he is God's son, and abiding in His favour, is that he is led by the Spirit of God. Nor is it difficult for any man to discover, whether this be the case with himself or no : since the works, which that good Spirit produces, are manifest, says the Apostle, to all. " The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." ¹ If, therefore, a man find these graces in his own heart and conduct, he may be sure, that, as it surpasses his own unassisted strength to plant them there, they must be planted by God : they must be the fruits of His good Spirit : and that he, being led by the Spirit, is the son of God. And thus it is, that, among modern Christians, the Spirit beareth witness, with our spirit, that we are the sons of

¹ Gal. v. 22.

God. For if the Spirit of God lead us, it will produce such fruits in our behaviour, as that our own natural conscience will, thereby, be satisfied of the safety and blessedness of our situation ; and, as St. John observes, “ Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence with God.” — He, therefore, who, on an impartial review of his own conduct, finds, that he is really, in the general course of his life, seeking to do his Heavenly Father’s will, need have no anxiety about his adoption, as God’s son ; because the very power of thus obeying God, is given by God Himself, and is an evidence, that God accepts us.

And this comparison of our behaviour with our principles, is the only ground of hope, which a Christian can have : since this, and not any secret assurance, independant of our actions, is the only comfort, which the apostle promises to any man. Nor does even this assurance, take notice,—nor does even this assurance extend to that pitch of confidence in our own election, which some men profess to enjoy ; as if, being now under God’s protection, and sanctified by His Spirit, we were thereby assured, that this Spirit would never be so far grieved with our perverseness, as to withdraw its aid, and leave us to perish. For all the gifts of God, it may be observed, are conditional ; and joined with some

efforts of our own ; something there always is, which we may do, or leave undone ; and on doing which, or forbearing from it, our eternal happiness, the continuance of God's assistance, and our share in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, depends. For no sooner had St. Paul declared, that the Spirit itself bears witness with the conscience of a real Christian, that he is born of God ; and that he is an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven, together with Christ ; than he immediately adds a caution against idle and unfruitful faith, or against the supposition that every thing is done for our salvation. " If so be," he says, " that we suffer with Christ."—So then it was possible, that even those to whom the Spirit bore witness, that they were sons of God, might yet fall away in a time of suffering and difficulty : they might, for a while, believe ; and yet, in time of temptation, fall away. So that the caution will still remain in force ; " let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall."¹ And no man can stand so surely in this world, but that his own carelessness, or want of faith, may, at any time, overturn his hopes, and that assurance of mercy, which was founded on the testimony of the Spirit in his heart. What comfort is there, then, to them who believe ; and

¹ 1 Cor. x. 12.

who, knowing their own weakness, look forward with doubt and dismay to the temptations which beset their onward path through life? I answer, great and sufficient comfort there is;—in the knowledge, that, weak as they are in themselves, the strength, which is given them by God, is more than sufficient for the work, which is set before them; and that if they do not forsake Him, He will never cast them away.

And as this is their support and comfort; so, on the other hand, is it a salutary caution to the best and wisest, that, from that blessed eminence they may, at any moment, fall: and that, consequently, no care can be too great, to preserve themselves from the sin of grieving the Holy Spirit of God; by whose presence in their hearts they are sealed to the day of redemption. And above all, whatever advances we may make in holiness should be considered, not as reasons of exultation, but of most humble gratitude to God, from whose Holy Spirit alone, and not by our own purity and strength they proceed; and whose smile, when it is withdrawn from our endeavours, because of our backslidings, will prove but too soon, and most fatally, that the race will not be to the swift, nor the victory to the strong.

Be diligent, therefore, in using those outward means of grace, whereby God sanctifies His chil-

dren from the world : be studious to follow, where the Spirit leads ; lest that blessed Spirit be withdrawn : and be lowly and humble before the Most High ; since it is to such only, that an increase, or continuance, of the Divine favour is promised.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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