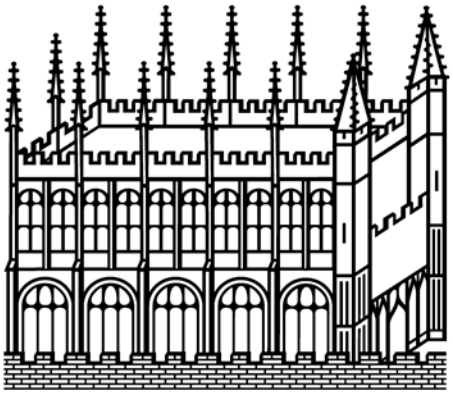

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THE GREAT PHYSICIAN

DEALING WITH SOULS

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THE QUESTIONS OF JESUS.

THE QUESTIONS OF JESUS

OR

THE GREAT PHYSICIAN DEALING WITH SOULS

FIFTY-TWO SHORT EXPOSITIONS FOR FAMILY READING

BY THE

REV. ARTHUR THOMSON,

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EDINBURGH:

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PREFACE.

THE little book now given to the public, is one of the many fruits of affliction. Brought up from the gates of death and permitted to cherish the hope of once more opening his lips in the house of God, the author was led to choose as his first text the words, "What think ye of Christ?" The study of this great question suggested the study of all the other questions put by our blessed Lord.

The following fifty-two papers are intended for Family Reading in the morning or evening of the Lord's day. They will perhaps meet the wants of many who know the profitableness and have felt the difficulties of such united household exercise. As the object of the writer was to produce a useful rather than an original work, he has not only used his own mind in studying the meaning of the sacred text, but has also availed himself freely of all critical and practical helps within his reach.

To meet any feeling of disappointment at the incompleteness of some single papers, it is right to refer the reader to other papers on identical or cognate subjects. For example, the subject of the question, "What think ye of Christ?" will be found treated not only under that heading, but also under the headings, "Whose Son is he?" "Whom do men say that I am?" "Whom do ye say that I am?"

It will be observed that one or two of the expositions have for their subjects rhetorical rather than real questions. These have been inserted not because there was any difficulty in making up the purposed number of fifty-two, but for the sake of variety, and to complete the round of truth. Taken altogether it is believed there is no important aspect of the Saviour's character, no vital truth respecting His person and work, which these questions do not illustrate; no phase of human experience to which they are not adapted, no great Christian duty which they do not enforce. With regard to the questions themselves, the writer feels he cannot say too much; with regard to the way in which he has handled them, it hardly needs modesty to know that he cannot say too little.

Reader, seek to be alone with the great Searcher. Jesus Christ is no dead or distant personage of the past, but a living and present questioner. He must be and He is answered. See that you answer Him aright.

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First.

WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

MATT. xxii. 42.—While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ?

OUR Lord's position, at this time, may be likened to that of a citadel, sustaining on every side a series of attacks, the only effect of which is to show, with ever increasing distinctness, both the weakness of its assailants, and its own impregnable strength. On this, the third day of the week on which He was put to death, all the leading parties of the Jewish Church and nation, the Herodians, the Sadducees, the Scribes, and the Pharisees, have tried Jesus with a succession of insidious questions. And what has been the result? No one can read the chapter from which our question is taken without marvelling at the ease with which He completely baffled their deepest devices. Accordingly, we read, no man after that durst ask Him any question. So far as this mode of warfare is concerned, His adversaries have done with Him, and He too has almost done with them. He has only one word more to say to them, and it is the weightiest He ever uttered. He has only one

question more to put, and it is the most fundamental and decisive He ever asked. "What think ye of Christ?" Who is He? What reply does your conscience return? What is the answer of Holy Scripture and of the holy men of old? Listen to the testimony to which the Lord here appeals.

Father Abraham, what thinkest thou of the Christ? Jehovah-jireh, the Lamb which the Lord will provide for a burnt-offering. I see His day afar off, and I am exceeding glad. Moses, the lawgiver and founder of the Jewish Church and state, what thinkest thou of the Christ? I esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. His worst thing is better than the best thing of the world. David, the man according to God's own heart, what thinkest thou of the Christ? "Thou art fairer than the sons of men, grace is poured into thy lips. Thou art all my salvation and all my desire." Solomon, the wisest of the children of men, what thinkest thou of the Christ? "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand, yea he is altogether lovely." Isaiah, the sweetest of all the prophets, what thinkest thou of the Christ? "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." O, Daniel, the man greatly beloved of God, what thinkest thou of the Christ? "He shall finish transgression, make an end of sin, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness." Jeremiah, what sayest thou of the Christ? "This

is the name whereby he shall be called, Jehovah, our righteousness." And as the question before us is meant for us not less than for the Pharisees, let us listen, moreover, to the testimony of the New Testament. John Baptist, the last and greatest of the prophets, what thinkest thou of the Christ? "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Peter, what thinkest thou of the Christ? "Lord, to whom can we go? thou hast the words of eternal life; we believe, and are sure that thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." Paul, the chief of the apostles, what thinkest thou of the Christ? "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things." John, the beloved disciple, who wast wont to lean on His bosom, what thinkest thou of the Christ? "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and the Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." Spirits of just men made perfect in glory, what think ye of the Christ? "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Holy God, we ask with reverence, what thinkest Thou of the Christ? "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him. Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. But unto the son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore, God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

Reader, you have heard the declarations of the saints, both of the Old Testament, and of the New, with regard to the Christ; can you, to any extent, make their language your own? If you dare not utter the words they uttered, can you honestly say, that you earnestly desire to be able to do so? Have you or have you not, in some measure, found the Christ to be to you what they knew and affirmed that He was to them? Can your thoughts of Jesus be right, if they are not in accordance with those of these wise and good men; if they are not in accordance with the judgment of God, whose judgment is always in accordance with truth?

How do you think of Christ? is it seldom or frequently? superficially or deeply? according to your own speculations or the statements of Scripture? What is the place Jesus holds in your estimation? is it the highest you can assign to Him, or is it merely secondary and subordinate? is there not another? is there not something else that is the chief object of your desire and delight? What is the honest answer of your conscience? What is the reply, furnished by your conduct, to this question? Do not evade, do not dismiss this inquiry. This is not a matter of trifling importance. It has the closest possible bearing upon your everlasting welfare. To err here is fatal. Do you not know, that according as you think of Christ, so you will think of all the great subjects that relate to your highest interests? According as you think of Christ, so will you think of sin, for it is only in the life and death of Christ that you see it in its true colours. According as you think of Christ, so will you think of this world,

for it is only by His cross the world is crucified to you and you to the world. According as you think of Christ, so will you think of the worth of your soul, for His shed blood alone fully shows its price. According as you think of Christ, so will you think of God, of His love of sinners, of His hatred of sin, of His unbending justice, and His unbounded mercy, for he that hath seen Him hath seen the Father. According as you think of Christ now, so will Christ think of you at the last day. Deny Him, He will deny you; confess Him, He will confess you. How unspeakably important, then, to know and feel aright with regard to the Christ. Remember this. The great adversary of your soul never forgets it. He uses all his arts to prevent you from thinking about Christ, or, if this is impossible, to persuade you to think erroneously and unworthily. Consider what is the great aim of all God's providential dealings with you. Whence all the ordinances and privileges of the Christian Church? Why is the Gospel preached to you? With what design has your Heavenly Father granted unto you the teaching of His word and Spirit? The end and object of all these things is that you may have right thoughts of Christ. "For this is life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent."

What think you of Christ? is the test
To try both your state and your scheme,
You cannot be right in the rest,
Unless you think rightly of Him.

As Jesus appears in your view,
As He is beloved or not;
So God is disposed to you,
And mercy or wrath are your lot.

Second.

WHOSE SON IS HE?

MATT. xxii. 43.—Whose son is He? They say unto Him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord?

To the first question, "Whose son is He?" the Pharisees had no difficulty in replying at once. "They say unto Him, the son of David? Did not the Scriptures say, that Christ cometh of the seed of David? It was foretold, "there shall come a root out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." That this promise referred to the Messiah was the universal belief of the Jews. Hence the prompt reply, "the son of David." Our Lord's second question, however, was not found to be so easy. "He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call Him Lord, how is He his son?" The passage here quoted is taken from the 110th Psalm, which all the Jews, these Pharisees, doubtless, among the rest, regarded as referring to the Messiah; and the thing which our Lord asked them to do, was to reconcile their answer with this quotation. Explain, says He, to these interpreters of the Law, how Messiah can be greater and yet less than David. How can He be at

once his sovereign and his son, his root and at the same time his offspring? "No man was able to answer him a word." They were altogether at a loss. They could not understand how things, seemingly then most opposite, could exist in the same person. Why were they so puzzled? How did it come to pass, that the able and learned doctors of the Jewish Church were unable to solve a difficulty which almost any child in any Bible-class can now explain? The reason is, that the Jews of our Lord's day, with very few exceptions, looked only for a human Messiah. It never entered into their minds that the Christ was to be divine as well as human. Their hearts were so filled with unbelief and wickedness that they would not consider the evidence which our Lord furnished with regard to His true character and claims. The inability of the rulers of the Jews to answer this question, notwithstanding all the advantages they enjoyed—especially during the ministry of our Lord, —is a most melancholy and striking proof of the disastrous effects of sinful prejudice; and it shews the utter inadequacy of all merely outward means, even of the highest and best that can be conceived, to convey truth to the biassed mind. How great then is the necessity of being enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

The only satisfactory answer that can be given to the question, How can the Messiah be both the Sovereign and the Son of David? is, that He is divine as well as human in his nature,—both God and man in one person. As God—existing from the beginning—the Christ is David's Lord, Lawgiver, and King. As man—born in Bethlehem—the Christ was David's son because He came of his family and tribe. He is David's Lord be-

cause He is the divine Redeemer, whom he loved, trusted and obeyed. He is David's son because He is his lineal descendant.

Knowing, as we do, the very wonderful constitution of Christ's person, we are neither embarrassed, nor perplexed, on the contrary, we greatly rejoice when we hear of the strange contrasts and apparently contradictory features which His character presents. He is the High and Lofty One, compared to whom, the mightiest potentates of this world are as nothing; yet who so gentle and condescending? The majestic Lion is also the meek and patient Lamb. Absolute, independent, Almighty God; He was, at the same time, a helpless babe, the most dependent of all creatures. All-sufficient Jehovah, the Possessor of all things; He had not where to lay His head. The Heaven, even the Heaven of Heavens, is His throne; yet He was the lowliest worshipper that ever knelt on the footstool of Earth. The Author and Controller of all agencies and events; He is a perfect model of resignation to the will of Jehovah. The Lord of Life, the Judge of the quick and the dead; He stood at the bar of Pilate, and received sentence of death from the lips of a creature of a day, of a worm of the dust. Endowed with spotless innocence and noblest worth; He suffered that which words cannot utter, as the basest of criminals. The adored of angels and archangels, the Glory of Heaven, the Delight of the heart of Jehovah! He was mocked and insulted, scourged and crucified, by men upon the earth.

Does the Christ unite in Himself every divine and human attribute? Can I neither name nor think of any noble or endearing quality that He does not possess?

Is there no one in all the universe that is nearer to God or nearer to me? Is there none in Heaven or in Earth of loftier rank or larger resources, of tenderer sympathy or truer love? Who, then, can be more worthy of my choice, my confidence and my homage? What am I waiting for? What more can I desire? Let me hear the Saviour's voice, and my soul shall live. "I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." "And the Spirit and the bride say come. And let him that heareth say come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

"What think ye of the Christ, whose Son is He?" It is plainly intimated in the words that follow this question,— and it is very manifest from the doom of the Pharisees,—that the only safe and satisfactory answer is, "He is the Son of God." Let us realize the meaning of this designation, and it will be impossible for us to incur their dreadful condemnation, for then our hearts will be moved with a deep sense of our Saviour's unspeakable condescension and compassion. According to the teaching of Scripture, this title, the Son of God, denotes essential equality with God. The Christ was in the form of God, and counted it no robbery to be equal with God. He sits on the throne of the Eternal. He is clothed with all the honour and majesty, all the dignity and glory of the most High. He is the Creator, the Controller, the Sustainer of this great universe, and of all that is therein. He is the All-sufficient God; He stands in need of nothing. "Our goodness extends not unto Him." "Can a man be profitable unto God?" Job xxii. 2. "If thou be righteous, what givest thou unto Him? or what receiveth He of thy hand?" This

name,—"The Son of God,"—moreover, signifies that He is the *only-begotten* of the Father, the sharer of His deepest counsels, the possessor of his eternal and ineffable love. Yet though He possesses all these things—the amount of which no finite mind can comprehend—the Son of God made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. What an amazing transition! What infinite condescension! So great was the love wherewith He loved us, that He could not endure that there should be any distance or difference between Himself and us. He knew, we could never climb up to Him, therefore He stooped down to us. He became a partaker of our nature, that we might become partakers of His, and that He might bare our sin in His own body on the tree. O my soul, ponder and dwell on this great mystery, and thou canst not fail to feel how much thou owest to the tenderness and mercy of thy Lord.

Realize whose son He is, and you shall better understand the greatness of the love of the Father to guilty men. Who was the person God devoted to the work of redemption? Whose son was it, that endured the scourge and the spitting, the shame and the scorn, the agony and the crucifixion? Was it the highest and brightest archangel of Heaven? Was it the loftiest of creatures? No. It was He, compared with whom, the greatest spirit, the nearest to the eternal throne, is small as dust. It was He, than whom Jehovah Himself is not better or more glorious. It was "the only begotten Son" whom the Father loves with all the tenderness,

endearment and delight of which His infinite nature is capable. When the question was the death of fallen man, or the death of His only Begotten, God spared not His own son, but delivered Him up for us all! Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

Third.

WHO CONVINCETH ME OF SIN?

JOHN viii. 46.—Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do you not believe me?

How amazing is the deceitfulness of sin! The Jewish antagonists of our Lord regarded themselves as God's freemen—"who were never in bondage to any man." In point of fact they were the most abject spiritual slaves. They thought themselves Abraham's seed, the children of God, and His peculiar favourites. The Faithful and True Witness solemnly declares on the contrary that they were the children of the Wicked One. And this awful charge He supports by the most ample proof. Ye are of your father the devil, (says He), because ye are animated by his spirit and ye practise his deeds. Ye reject me,—the Truth. Ye seek to kill me,—the Life. Ye are guilty of falsehood and of murder, and these are the chief features of the character of Satan, who is a liar and a murderer from the beginning. Having said these things, Jesus fixes His calm and searching gaze upon His opponents, and asks them, in order to carry conviction to their hearts, and to awaken them to a sense of their true character and dreadful condition. "Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" This is a question

which only one person in the world could ask. Where is the child of earth, that could with truth make this appeal? It stands alone. What does it amount to? It is a claim to entire freedom from sin,—to absolute perfection. Though it has been disputed, it does not admit of doubt, that the word rendered "sin" is rightly translated, and that it means moral evil. To allege, as some have done, that it signifies merely intellectual error, is to adopt an interpretation alike inconsistent with the scope of our Lord's argument, which refers to things moral or religious; and contrary to the usage of New Testament writers, and especially of John. Besides, does not absolute freedom from intellectual error necessarily imply freedom from sin, just as absolute freedom from sin implies freedom from intellectual error? If our Lord was neither a fanatic, the victim of self-deception, nor an hypocrite, who knew that he transgressed the law of God, and denied it (and who can believe he was either the one or the other), the question before us is an assertion of conscious sinlessness. Nor does this testimony regarding himself stand alone. On more than one occasion He found it necessary to make a similar declaration. He bears record of Himself—"I do always those things that please the Father." "I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." Of all the biographies of good men recorded in Scripture or elsewhere, that of Jesus Christ is the only one which contains no confessions of penitence, no acknowledgment of shortcomings, no prayers for the pardon of sin. Yet no man was so humble as He was.

But the words of this question not only express a personal consciousness of freedom from sin, they appeal to

the testimony of others in proof of innocence. Jesus openly challenges His adversaries to substantiate against Him the charge of guilt. "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" They had enjoyed every opportunity to observe His manner of life from first to last. They had seen him in every variety of circumstance and condition. They had marked His career with the greatest strictness and jealousy. They had never ceased to wait for His halting. They had been eager to detect blemishes, and doubtless if any blemish there had been, they would have brought it to light. But all their efforts failed to discover any sin of any sort. And they were driven at last to the infamous expedient of hiring false witnesses to find an accusation against Him.

The innocence of Jesus is proved by positive as well as by negative testimony. The hard and heartless Roman Governor, who has never been suspected of any leaning towards charity or mercy, was forced to say, "I find no fault in him." His wife was, somehow, so overpowered by a sense of the purity of the persecuted one, that the thought of her husband being involved in the guilt of His death, disturbed her sleep and haunted her dreams. The soldier, who presided at the awful tragedy, was so moved by the spectacle Jesus presented, that he was constrained to cry out, "Truly this was a righteous man." The malefactor, who witnessed His expiring agonies, testified with his latest breath, "This man hath done nothing amiss." The base traitor, who for years had enjoyed the most intimate and confidential intercourse with his master, in the hour of remorse, could remember nothing fitted to quiet his conscience; and sealed by his death the confession, "I have betrayed innocent blood." Unclean spirits

acknowledged Jesus as the Holy One of God. Satan the accuser could find nothing in Him. He tried every artifice that keenest malice could devise. He attacked Jesus on every side, and at every season: but all his efforts were utterly in vain. He could not detect the slightest flaw. He could not discover the smallest joint in the panoply of righteousness. Like pure gold, the integrity of Jesus never shone so brightly as in the furnace. But, may there not have been guilt, which neither the eye of man, nor devil, nor His own eye could discover? Listen then to the highest evidence that can be desired. Death, who has never been bribed, could not convince Jesus of sin. Had he done so, he would have kept Him a prisoner for evermore in that blackness of darkness, that overwhelmed His soul in Gethsemane and Calvary. The law and justice of God, could not convince Him of sin. They exact payment to the uttermost farthing. They demand satisfaction to the smallest iota. And had they found in Him the slightest flaw of guilt, they would have held Him bound, as by an adamantine chain, for ever and ever. Hearken above all to the voice of the God of truth, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." By raising Jesus from the dead on the third day, the Father set His seal to all His claims, and therefore to the claim of perfect innocence among the rest. There is no fact of Christianity supported by testimonies so many in number, or so clear and decisive in their nature, as the fact of the absolute sinlessness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and there is none more influential or important.

Is Jesus Christ free from all imperfection and defect? Then He stands alone among men. There is none like

Him. There is none on all the earth that can be compared to Him. Is He without original or actual sin? Whence then comes He? Is He of earth or of Heaven? How was it possible for Him to be pure in the midst of universal pollution? He must be something more than a mere man. Truly this is the Son of God.

Did Jesus Christ exhibit a perfect character, not in the unapproachable heavens, but here on earth, in flesh and blood, and under the conditions to which men in general are subject, in the midst of poverty, and toil, and sorrow, and suffering, then He stands before us, a true, complete and universal pattern and example. Let me make Him the model of my imitation.

Had Jesus no sin of His own to answer for? Is He holy, harmless, and undefiled,—a Lamb without blemish and spot? How admirably qualified is He to act as our substitute, and to present a sacrifice for our sins! Had He been guilty of sin, what could He have done for us? Of what merit his obedience? of what value His death? of what efficacy His intercession?

Is Jesus Christ perfectly sinless? It necessarily follows that He is perfectly truthful and trustworthy. God hath given Him for a witness to the people, and if I do not listen to His testimony and teaching, why is it? If He speaks to me the truth, why do I not believe what He says? Do I prefer my sin to my Saviour, the lie of Satan to the truth of God?

Fourth.

THE WORLD OR THE SOUL?

MATT. XVI. 26.—For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

How solemn the question! how awful the choice here presented! Let me consider and answer as in the sight of God and for eternity. Let me dismiss from my view all earthly and material things, and call home my thoughts. Oh, my soul, awake, consider ere it be too late, thy dignity and responsibility.

How great art thou! Thou art the masterpiece of God's hand, the last work of creation. Survey all thy parts and powers. Think of the workshop of reason, where all the arts are invented, all the sciences, and all the systems elaborated; the storehouse of memory, in which is laid up all the past; the court-chamber of conscience, God's own bench and tribunal in miniature, which anticipates and confirms by its decisions the judgments of the great day. Think of the throne-room of the will, into which the mightiest tyrant on earth is unable to force an entrance; the banquetting-hall of the affections, where the great God Himself may be daily entertained as a guest! Consider those aspirations that wander through eternity; those exquisite sensibilities of pleasure and pain; those capacities which this world

and all that is therein are not large enough to fill. Think how thou art "unalterable by external change," and unassailable by death, and capable of endless progression, ever ascending higher and higher, or sinking deeper and deeper throughout eternity. For such as thee the lamp of revelation was kindled at first, and has been kept burning from age to age: for such as thee patriarchs, prophets, apostles, confessors, and martyrs have toiled and bled; for such as thee the angels of heaven come down to wait and to serve; for such as thee the hosts of light and darkness ever strive; for such as thee the many mansions of glory have been prepared; for thee the most High God watches with care; for thee the Son of God laid down His life. What a price! What a ransom! Neither silver, nor gold, nor rubies, nor pearls, nor any corruptible thing, nor man, nor angel, could procure thy ransom. Nothing was of sufficient value to obtain thy deliverance except the blood of Him that was God. Reflect on what thou art capable of becoming, — the temple of the Holy Ghost — the Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ, the child and heir of the eternal God. Truly then, O my soul, thou art precious above all price, great beyond all reckoning. Compared to thee all the riches, honours, pleasures, and possessions of this world are trifles. If thou art safe, my all is safe; if thou art lost, my all is lost.

And this is the awful possibility the Lord has commanded me to contemplate. The terms of this unanswerable question plainly imply what the Scriptures elsewhere distinctly declare, that the soul, or higher life, is in danger of being lost. All men do not reach heaven at last. Every one does not secure everlasting happiness at death. "Wide is the gate, and broad is the

way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." The soul, that is, I, myself, may be lost; and what words can utter, what heart can conceive, how dreadful is this loss? It is to lose not being, but well-being. Annihilation is impossible, I am an immortal creature. It is to be deprived of all good, and to endure all evil. It is to be condemned to live for ever with the father of lies, and with all his filthy and wretched dupes, and with none else. It is to suffer evermore all the agonies and terrors of a guilty conscience, and all the wrath of God—even woe without alloy or abatement.

This loss is irreparable. Lost health may be regained, lost reputation, lost property, lost friendship may be recovered; but if the soul is lost, it is for ever. As the tree falls so shall it lie. This is loss for which there is no compensation. In the good providence of God, the heaviest calamities—such as the loss of sight, speech, hearing, and health, may be to a large extent made up for by means of substitutes; but as for the loss of the soul there is no alleviation. But the most dreadful thing about this loss is, that the conscience of the sufferer will testify, that it is self-caused. He took away his highest life with his own hand. He is a spiritual suicide. He might have escaped had he chosen. Mercy was within his reach, and was most freely and fully offered, but he spurned it He preferred the pleasures of sin and of the world to the interests of his soul. Hence he reaps what he sowed. The consciousness of this is a worm that dieth not, and a fire that is not quenched. Lest this doom should be mine, let me ponder most seriously the awful yet simple alternative here presented. Let me suppose that I have actually gained the whole

world, the sum total of all its enjoyments, animal, intellectual, and emotional; all its riches, honours, possessions, and pleasures are mine. I have acquired, let it be imagined, what no man ever has acquired. Suppose further, I have secured the whole world, and all that is in it, at the cost of my bodily health or natural life. Have I not made a very bad bargain? What are all these enjoyments to me, if I have not health? If, then, it is foolish and absurd to purchase the world at the cost even of bodily health, it must be infinitely more irrational to earn all earthly things at the cost of the eternal life or happiness of my soul. The man who secures possessions and pleasures on these terms will bitterly curse his madness throughout eternity. He has gained the world, but he has lost his soul. He has grasped a shadow, and has lost an eternal inheritance. And what equivalent shall he find for the happiness he has lost? How shall he buy it back? What shall he give in exchange for his soul? The whole world is utterly worthless for this purpose. All that ill-gotten wealth cannot purchase even a moment's respite at the hour of death, or even so much as one drop of cold water to cool the parched tongue in the lake of fire.

The world or the soul, which is the more valuable? I cannot have them both. It is impossible. My Lord and master here declares, that if I gain the world, I must lose my soul; and if I gain the soul, I must lose the world. The two things are in direct and perpetual antagonism, they are here put into opposite scales. Their interests are irreconcilable. "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity against God; whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the

enemy of God." Ye cannot serve both God and mammon. To choose the one is to reject the other. My choice is restricted to these two things, the world or the soul. Is it difficult to determine which of them is entitled to the preference? Am I not capable of deciding between them? I have had ample time to make up my mind. The issue concerns me. It is a matter of life or death. Why should I hesitate? Choose this day whom ye will serve.

"What is the thing of greatest price
The whole creation round?
That which was lost in paradise,
That which in Christ is found.

The soul of man—Jehovah's breath,
That keeps two worlds at strife;
Hell moves beneath to work its death,
Heaven stoops to give it life.

God to reclaim it did not spare
His well-beloved Son;
Jesus, to save it, deigned to bear
The sins of all in one.

The Holy Spirit sealed the plan,
And pledged the blood divine,
To ransom every soul of man,
That price was paid for mine.

Then let us gather round the cross,
This knowledge to obtain;
Not by the soul's eternal loss,
But everlasting gain."

JAMES MONTGOMERY.

Fifth.

WHAT IS THY NAME?

MARK v. 9.—And He asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.

WHAT a revolting sight is presented to our view in this part of Scripture! Here is a miserable creature "possessed" to such a frightful extent, that he seems to partake more largely of the nature of a devil than of a man. He hates the light of day and human society. His place of abode is amidst the pollutions of "the tombs." He is the terror and scourge of the district in which he lives. He scorns alike decency and restraint, clothing and fetters. Nor is he altogether insensible to his horrible condition. Dethroned reason, once and again, strives to regain its seat. This miserable slave does not always hug his chains; on the contrary, he tries sorely to shake off his galling yoke. Behold a fully developed specimen of the misery Satan delights to produce. "Always night and day he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones." Such was the person who first went forth to meet Jesus when he landed on the south-eastern coast of the sea of Galilee. When he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him. Does he come willingly, as the most wretched of sinners, to an almighty and all-merciful Saviour? Or does he come as a spirit

of darkness into the presence of his Judge, to deprecate his doom? Let him speak for himself: he cried with a loud voice, and said, "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most High God? I adjure thee, by God, that thou torment me not." A little while ago, with a single word, Jesus had hushed the wildest uproar of the elements of nature, "He rebuked the winds and the waves, and there was a great calm." Can he also speak peace to this troubled and tempest-toss'd spirit? He is Lord of the natural world. Does His sway extend also to the realm of the supernatural? He speaks in the same tone of authority to the evil spirits as to the winds and the waves of the sea. He does not argue or entreat. He commands, "*Come out of him, thou unclean spirit.*" It is a remarkable and unusual circumstance, that the evil one did not immediately obey, and come out. He remained and remonstrated. The merciful Physician, for obvious reasons, deemed it better that the expulsion of the demon should be gradual and gentle, rather than instantaneous and forcible. He accordingly asks, "What is thy name?" What art thou? a whole or a part? a distinct individual or the "particle" of another? a responsible agent, or the creature of circumstances? Art thou a man, or a mere tool to be used, a machine to be driven and drilled, at the bidding of Satan? Like too many in our own time, this man has ingloriously sunk himself in another, and surrendered himself all but entirely to the influence of a will stronger than his own. Therefore, if he is to be dealt with as a rational being, the first thing requisite, to effect a mental cure, is to deliver him from the ruinous consequences of self-contempt, to lead him to exercise his own understanding and

conscience, and to awaken him to a sense of his own dignity and responsibility. This being done, the man, brought to a sense of personal guilt, and duty, could not help trying to shake off, finally and for ever, the yoke of the foul usurper, by which he had been so long enthralled.

Another purpose of this question was to bring out distinctly the extent of the evil influences to be encountered; the greatness of the calamity to be removed; and, consequently, the irresistible power of the Deliverer. Does Jesus Christ pity one in a condition so low, so loathsome as this? Is He stronger than the most numerous and powerful combination of the spirits of darkness? In what condition, in what circumstances, then, can we be warranted to despair of His help? For what is the name here given? It is Legion. It is as if he said, "I am one, yet many; an embattled host; an army consisting of ten thousand soldiers, all brave, strong, experienced, and blood-thirsty, sworn to the same cause, and obeying as one man the word of our commander." What a formidable host! Who could stand before the Roman legion? It conquered the world. But behold a greater and mightier is here. Jesus has but to open his lips, and all the hosts of darkness are driven away like chaff before the wind. He speaks the word, and lo, he who was possessed with a whole legion of devils sits at His feet clothed, and in his right mind.

Would we see an emblem and a picture of sin? Let us fix our eyes on this miserable sufferer. His demon-possessed body is a type of the sin-possessed soul. This man tore off his raiment. The sinner has rent asunder and cast away from his soul the robe of original

righteousness. This wretched creature found a congenial dwelling-place in dark and distant caverns among the mountains, and he revelled amidst the rottenness and corruption of tombs. The sinner isolates himself from his fellow-men, separates himself from his God, loves the darkness rather than the light; and out of his heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, falsehoods, blasphemies. The demoniac was endowed with superhuman strength, "No man could bind him, no, not with chains." Fetters were to him as the green withs to Samson. In like manner the sinner breaks through all human restraints, such as health and interest, fear and shame, experience and conscience. Neither precept nor example, neither advice nor warning, neither mercies nor judgments, neither the fear of hell nor the hope of Heaven can arrest him in his downward course. The demoniac day and night was "cutting himself with stones." The sinner is ever degrading and destroying his own soul, unfitting himself for the enjoyment of health and happiness, abusing all the parts and powers of his mind and body, and wasting his time, talents, influence and property. The demoniac was the terror and scourge of the neighbourhood in which he lived, "He was exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way." The same is true of the sinner, but in a sense infinitely more dreadful. He is doing injury continually to the character, honour, and happiness of his neighbours. He is a foul pestilence in the commonwealth; he is a grief and a disgrace to his family and friends, a scandal to religion, and an enemy of the Church of God. The demoniac had no rest; day and night he was wandering about, crying and howling. "There

is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." They are liked the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and filth.

Truly the name of sin is Legion. It is anger, malice, intemperance, murder, impurity, unfaithfulness, dishonesty, equivocation, dissimulation, falsehood, hypocrisy, ingratitude, disobedience, impatience, discontentment, envy, covetousness; it is profanity, formality, superstition, idolatry, blasphemy, and atheism. It is a repudiation of the authority, a defiance of the power, a slight to the wisdom, a contempt of the holiness, and unthankfulness for the goodness of God. It is the cause of all the error, conflict, cruelty, suffering, weeping, and woe that exist in this world. Like a foul demon, it has poisoned and polluted, blighted and cursed everything it has touched. It has caused man, the noblest work of God, to become the destroyer of his own soul, the murderer of his brother, the enemy of his God. It has transformed angels into devils, light into darkness, love into hatred, life into death, and the paradise of God into this curse-burdened earth. Satan still works in the hearts of men. Is my soul sin-possessed? What am I in the sight of the holy and heart-searching God? What is my name? Is my heart an abode of the wicked One, or is it a temple of the Holy Ghost? Has the foul spirit been cast out? Am I indeed sitting daily at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in my right mind?

O mighty Son of God, Saviour of the world, glory be to Thy name for ever and ever. Thou art stronger than the strongest of the spirits of darkness. Thou art both able and willing to bring into subjection to Thyself the most hardened, hopeless, and abandoned of sinners.

Sixth.

WHY DISPUTE YE BY THE WAY?

MARK ix. 33, 34.—And being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves who should be greatest.

OUR Lord has just announced to His disciples His approaching death and resurrection. He has invited them to meditate, as they had need to do, on the grand central facts of Christianity. But these great and blessed truths were to their carnal hearts as strange and unwelcome things. They were quite unable to understand His words, and they were afraid to ask what they meant. They saw clearly enough that some great event was about to take place, and they could think of nothing else than the setting up of the long-looked-for worldly kingdom. Therefore, instead of looking unto Jesus, and keeping their hearts fixed firm upon His cross and its triumphs, they begin to think and to speak of themselves and their prospects. The invariable result followed. Turning away their eyes from the Saviour, they fall into the most grievous sin. The more ambitious of their number discuss which of them should hold the chief office, and enjoy the highest honour in the new kingdom. Each of them, doubtless, would think himself entitled to the first place. The relatives

of our Lord: those who had been earliest called to the apostleship; those who had been most largely endowed with natural and spiritual gifts; those who had already enjoyed special privileges, would, each in their turn, state and press their claims. Various things had recently taken place, which probably added to the keenness of the discussion. Our Lord had chosen Peter, James, and John, from among the twelve, to be present during His transfiguration on the holy mount. The same three disciples were the sole witnesses of the restoration to life of the daughter of Jairus a short time ago. Moreover, our Lord had paid Peter's temple-tax along with His own. These circumstances may have been the occasion of stirring up envy and jealousy. Certain it is that when they were travelling to Capernaum, the spirit of rivalry had been strongly manifested, and had as usual given rise to angry feelings and to bitter words. Although Jesus knew of these unseemly divisions and disputes when they took place, He took no action with regard to them then. The all-wise Master administers reproof to His disciples not only in the best spirit and manner, but also at the best time and place. Therefore it was not until they arrived at the end of their journey, and were all gathered together in the house, and seated at the same table, that He referred to the painful subject. Calmly, searchingly, authoritatively He puts the question, "What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?" What was the subject and cause of your discussions, when you were apart from me, and, as ye thought, beyond my knowledge? Conscious of guilt, as well they might be, they are silent and ashamed. How easy to indulge in strife, debate, and dissension in the Master's absence.

How difficult to defend, or even to define the controversy when we come into his presence. Whence this angry contest? It arose, as is too frequently the case, from that pride and vainglory, that ambition and selfishness, against which the whole spirit, teaching, and life of our Lord were the most emphatic protest that could possibly be made. The disciples knew well that the greatness which their Master ever recommended by words and exemplified by deeds, was the very opposite of that for which they had been contending so hotly. They did not require to be told that Christian superiority and excellence consist of humility and self-sacrifice. It was one of their Master's every-day maxims, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted, he that exalteth himself shall be brought low." Therefore, when He brings to light, as He will ever do, that which was done in secret, and when he calls them to account—as He will reckon with every one of us—they are confounded and speechless. They cannot answer Him. They have not one word to say in self-defence.

The Lord, as we have seen already, did not ask what was the subject of their dispute, because He did not know it, but because he desired to brand with His strongest condemnation their unseemly behaviour. He would have them understand, that He does not regard the desire of pre-eminence and jealousy, wrath and bitterness, as trifling evils.

The disciples of Jesus Christ are all sprung from the same common parent; born in the same low and lost spiritual condition, they all receive the same baptism of the Holy Ghost, partake of the same heavenly bread, drink of the same sacramental cup, and travel on the same narrow path of holiness. They are all servants

of the same Master, and members of the same mystical body. They are all children of the same Father of Peace, heirs of the same blessed kingdom of glory, and they all hope to dwell together throughout eternity in the same home of perfect love and joy. Therefore, doth it not become those who have so many things in common, to lay aside all envy and jealousy, all wrath and bitterness? Ought they not to cultivate the spirit of concord and conciliation, and to cherish lowliness, meekness, tenderness, forbearance, brotherly kindness, and charity? Is it a small matter that, by reason of carnality and contention, selfishness and ambition among Christians, the enemies of truth and godliness should have occasion to blaspheme; the weak should be offended and turned out of the way; the glorious Gospel of the grace of God marred and hindered; the Church wasted and torn limb from limb; the Good Spirit grieved and quenched; the Saviour wounded, and Jehovah provoked to jealousy? Truly the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. For where envy and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. Therefore let all our things be done in charity. "Love is the fulfilling of the whole law." It is the distinguishing feature of the true Christian. It is the royal law of the house of God. It is the crown of the soldier of the cross. It is the zone which binds together the panoply of the saint. Charity is the bond of perfectness. It is the sun of the spiritual firmament, the noblest and loveliest, the most generous and the most God-like of all the graces of the Spirit. "Now abideth faith, hope, charity, but the greatest of these is charity." "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment on the head,

that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore."

Brotherly kindness is inseparably connected with humility. Accordingly, the chief purpose our Lord had in view when he put this question was to prepare the minds of His disciples for the reception of the great principle, which He was about to unfold. "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all and the servant of all." This is the fundamental law of the kingdom of heaven. Pride is the high-road to shame. Humility alone leads to true honour. Real superiority is attainable only by lowliest service. There was no other pathway to glory for Christ, there is no other for Christians.

This great but much neglected truth Jesus taught by deed as well as by words. Sitting with the twelve arranged in a circle around Him, He calls to Him a little child, and sets him in the midst of them: then taking the little one in His arms, He said, look at this child, observe how humble, trustful, and teachable it is, see how it obeys my call, accepts my invitation, yields itself up entirely to my control, how quietly and contentedly it remains in the position where I put it, how confidingly it rests on my arm and leans on my bosom. "Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Go and learn what this meaneth.

Seventh.

WHEREFORE DIDEST THOU DOUBT?

MATT. xiv. 31.—O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

THE impression produced by the feeding of the five thousand was so great, that the multitude began to speak among themselves of taking Jesus by force and making Him their King. Our Lord, at once, took steps to prevent this. He constrained His disciples,—who were all too ready to entertain and give effect to such a proposal,—to get into a ship and to go before Him unto the other side of the Lake; and He sent the multitude away to their homes. Having done these things, "He went up into a mountain apart to pray."

How did it fare with His disciples in His absence? Soon after they set sail, the sun went down, and clouds began to gather on the face of the sky. The wind rushes down the gorges of the mountains. Sea and sky engage in furious conflict. The waves break over the ship which at one moment leaps high in the air on the top of the billows, and at another dives deep down in the abyss;—now it is driven to this side, again to that;—at one time, it is thrown forwards, at another, it is hurled backwards. "The wind was contrary unto them," so that all night long, during eight or nine hours, the disciples toil and row, wrestle and buffet with the

waves, without making much nearer the opposite shore. Though they had left the beach with reluctance, no amount of difficulty and danger leads them to entertain the thought of disobeying their Master's command, "to go before Him unto the other side." But now the storm and the wind are more violent than ever. Their strength is exhausted, and they cannot hold out much longer. They know not what to do;—they expect every moment is to be their last. At this hour of extreme distress, they see through the spray, at a short distance, what seems to them a ghost, walking on the waves and coming toward them, Is this the angel of destruction?—the spirit of the tempest?—or what? Their superstitious hearts are filled with amazement and horror, and they shriek out for fear. Then Jesus makes Himself known unto them. Lo! the well-known, calm and gentle tones fall upon their ears. "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." How often does the "brother born for adversity" thus come to His people, in a time and way that they think not of; and when they are looking for every one except Himself. His heart was with them during every hour of the storm and conflict of that dreadful night. From the mountain top, "*He saw them toiling in rowing*," on the troubled sea below. He hears the howl of every gust of wind that blows, marks the swell of every wave that beats against that little boat which contains His Church; and never withdraws His eye from it, even for a moment. But it does not seem good to Him, to hush the storm into a calm, as soon as it arises. It is necessary that His people should be exercised in danger and in conflict for a season. At His own set time Jesus ever comes to the help of His chosen.

As soon as Peter identified his Master, with characteristic buoyancy of spirit, he speedily rose, from the lowest depths of despair, to the giddy heights of presumption and romantic daring. As if he had not had enough of them already, he courts dangers and trials. On the impulse of the moment, he exclaims, Lord bid me come unto thee on the water. Notwithstanding all the impetuosity and eagerness of his nature he will not act without his Master's consent. He asks leave to make an experiment in divine things. The Master grants his request; He knew that the result would be salutary. As soon as the word of permission was given, Peter steps from the boat and sets his foot upon the troubled sea. Behold him walking upon the heaving billows. What man except himself could have done it, or so much as essayed to do it? And how did he succeed? As long as his eye and heart are fixed, in faith upon Christ alone, the waves beneath his feet are as firm and solid as the granite pavement; but when he ceased to look unto Jesus, and began to consider the length of the distance that lay between them; and the height of the waves that rose and swelled on every side, then Peter began to fear, and when fear took the place of faith, as in every other case, he began to sink, and to shriek. Even when going down, he does not give way to despair. From the deep waters, where there is no standing, he cries out, "Lord save me," and the Lord heard and delivered him. "Immediately He stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

How faithful and yet how tender and loving, are the words of his expostulation! Observe the terms employed. It is not, O faithless and perverse one. Ex-

aggerated and indiscriminate censure defeats its own end. It is, O thou of *little* faith. He receives credit for all that he possesses. Peter had faith, real and heartfelt, for what but this led him to leave the ship, walk for a little on the sea, and rely upon the Lord for deliverance when he was in extreme danger? Therefore, he is reproved, not because he had no faith at all, but because it was feeble, fitful, and wavering. The reprimand is not, wherefore didst thou *dare*, but, wherefore didst thou *doubt;* for, although there was foolish daring, the main fault was sinful distrust. Notice, further, the terms of rebuke are not, wherefore *dost* thou, but, wherefore *didst* thou, doubt; for his unbelief is a thing of the past; Peter doubts no more whether his Lord can enable him to brave the angriest tempest, and tread beneath his feet the highest billows. But, while fullest credit is given, and every allowance is made, it is plainly intimated, that no circumstances can ever arise, in which, it can be other than foolish to harbour an unbelieving doubt or fear. Nothing can justify distrust of the Saviour's strength and help.

Fellow sinner, Wherefore do you doubt? Is it because your sins are so many and so heinous? This does not furnish you with any valid ground for standing in doubt of Christ, but the contrary. The more numerous and criminal your offences, the more urgent is the necessity of abandoning all faith in yourself, and therefore, the greater the reason for relying upon Him. Why hesitate with regard to Him? Can you believe He is not able to save you? Has He not rescued thousands of sinners, as hardened and degraded as you are? Or can you think He is not willing to deliver you? Has He ever rejected any who came to Him? Is not the

word of His promise quite sufficient? Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.

Disciple of the Lord Jesus, wherefore do you doubt? Is it because you are walking in darkness and have no light? This may be a good reason why you should distrust yourself, and others like yourself; but it does not warrant you to distrust Christ. The thicker the darkness that surrounds you, so much stronger is the argument for faith in Him who is the Light of the World, and in whom is no darkness at all. Look unto Him, and never turn away your eyes, and you shall be lightened.

Tempest-tossed child of God, wherefore do you doubt? What grounds are there for distrust? Search the matter to the bottom and you will find that unbelief is utterly indefensible. Do you point to the dangers that encompass your path?—to the fierce winds, foaming waves, and raging storms? While these things furnish an argument for ceasing to lean on an arm of flesh, they also constitute a reason for putting confidence in the Lord. For who but He can conquer the winds and the waves? Are you pursuing the path He has prescribed? Then, although He may seem to be absent, and your strength fails, and midnight and tempest reign all around, still you are not to doubt. The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice, the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on High is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea than the mighty waves of the sea.

Hope thou in God. Hast thou not been enabled to take the first and most difficult step? Hast thou not walked on the waves already? Are not thy salvation and strength entirely of God, and to no extent of thy-

self? Is not every difficulty and danger foreseen and provided for? Where will you find one whom Christ has deceived or disappointed? Wherefore, then, dost thou doubt? "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."

O Jesus, Saviour of the lost, my Rock and Hiding-place,
By storms of sin and sorrow lost, I seek thy sheltering grace.

Guilty, forgive me, Lord! I cry; pursued by foes I come;
A sinner, save me, or I die; an outcast, take me home.

Once safe in Thine almighty arms, let storms come on amain;
There danger never, never harms; there death itself is gain.

And when I stand before Thy throne, and all Thy glory see,
Still be my righteousness alone to hide myself in Thee.

E. H. BICKERSTETH.

Eighth.

WILT THOU BE MADE WHOLE?

JOHN v. 6.—When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?

WHERE was Jesus most frequently to be found? Not in the palaces of grandeur, pleasure, or ease, but amidst the scenes of sorrow and distress, weakness and want. The good Physician did not think it enough to heal all who came, or who were brought unto Him. He went forth to seek those who could not, or would not, betake themselves unto Him. Accordingly, having come up to Jerusalem to keep one of the sacred festivals of the Jews, He repaired to the pool of Bethesda—the house of mercy,—a place resorted to by crowds of sufferers of all sorts, on account of the healing virtue of its waters, which, at certain seasons, instantaneously cured the first person that stepped into them, not of one kind of malady alone, but of whatever disease he had. From among the great multitudes that lay for shelter in the five porticoes, or arches, that opened into, and surrounded the pool, Jesus singled out one as the object of His healing. This was a poor cripple, who had been infirm for the long period of thirty and eight years. Beholding the miserable man with tenderest compassion, the Lord puts to him the question, "Wilt thou be made whole?"

Dost thou desire health? Dost thou wish once more to walk? What a question, we are ready to say, to put to any sufferer! Who can doubt that the man is most willing, most anxious—nay, more, that he would give all the world to be cured? What but the desire of health brought him to Bethesda at first? What but the same feeling has prompted him to return hither again and again? What but this has kept him coming and going to this place until his weary heart has become sick through hope deferred? Where is the patient that would not like to recover from his disease? Is there anything on earth that men desire so much, and for which they would make so great a sacrifice, as health? Tell them of a physician of skill, and they will go to him in crowds, though he may be at the end of the earth, grudging neither the toil nor the cost. No one knew this better than Jesus Christ, and yet He put this question,—and why did He do so?

In the first place, this inquiry was made in order to arouse the attention of His followers, and of the great multitude of blind, halt, and withered that lay in these porticoes, so that they might understand something of the amount of love and power involved in the miracle about to be performed in their presence. Had not our Lord by means of this question brought out fully all the facts of the case, and showed the nature and continuance of the disease, that the sufferer was without any human helper, and utterly unable to help himself, the wonderful work would not have made the same impression on the beholders, consequently the same amount of good would not have been accomplished, and God would not have been so fully glorified.

In the second place, the question was undoubtedly

put for the sake of the man himself. Behold this wretched and careworn creature. In the sad and settled expression of his countenance we see the painful traces of manifold delays and disappointments, of long-continued neglect and suspense. No ray of hope sparkles in his eye. He is forsaken and forlorn, dull and desponding. He would have been more than human had he felt otherwise in the circumstances in which he was placed. He has none to pity, none to help him. For a long time he has not heard so much as one kind word of interest or sympathy. It is always the same thing over and over again with him. Just when he is about to come forward, some one else steps down before him; and so, it is plain, there may be hope for others, but there can be very faint hope for him. How many have been healed since first he began to come and to go? Therefore, much as he may desire, he has all but ceased to expect recovery. Hence the reason why Jesus puts this question. It was to arouse the poor sufferer from the lethargy of despair, to deepen the sense of entire helplessness, to awaken faith and hope in his withered heart.

Nor was the inquiry made for his sake alone, but for ours also. It points not so much to the body as to the soul. This world is a large hospital. Everywhere—within and around—in myself and in all others—are to be seen the effects and symptoms of the spiritual disease of sin: langour, weakness, restlessness, nervous fears, groanings, and labourings. How familiar are we with the depraved appetite, the foul tongue, the jaundiced eye, the palsied organs! How many forms of malady meet our eyes: how common are the swellings of pride; the gripes of envy; the fever of passion; the dropsy of

covetousness; the leprosy of uncleanness; the spasms of jealousy; the convulsions of anger; the consumption of unbelief. The disease of sin is deep-seated in the spiritual system, being hereditary and constitutional. It is gradual and imperceptible in operation and progress. It affects all the parts of the soul, and strikes its roots deeper and deeper day by day, until no health, or soundness remains. It is contagious, dangerous, and deadly. It is incurable by all the appliances of science and by all the art of men. For this fell disease God, in infinite mercy, has devised an all-sufficient remedy. The Lord Jesus Christ is the great Physician of souls. He possesses in the highest degree every necessary qualification. He is appointed and approved of God to undertake the care and cure of sin-sick men. He is almighty, all-wise, all-merciful. He is endowed with infinite skill, tenderness, sympathy, patience, and diligence. There is not any form of spiritual disease, however deep-seated, malignant, or long-continued, which He cannot instantaneously and perfectly cure. There is not a sufferer on earth whom He is unwilling to heal. The remedy He propounds is free and open to all. When fairly tried, it has never failed so much as in one case. It is a sovereign and infallible specific. It is nothing else than His own precious blood shed as an atonement for sin. Are these things so? Is this disease indeed so prevalent and fatal? Is the Physician indeed able and willing to heal all manner of spiritual sickness without money and without price? Why, then, is not every sufferer healed? Why is there not universal spiritual health? This is the very inquiry which this question was intended to raise. Why are men so greatly alarmed on account of a distemper that attacks their

bodies, and so indifferent to the inroads of a malady that preys upon their minds? Why display such haste to send for the healer of the meaner and baser part, and neglect the remedy and despise the Physician of that which is spiritual and immortal? Whence this strange inconsistency? The reason is sin produces insensibility: it blunts the feelings, blinds the mind, deadens the heart. This is one of its most perilous effects. Its victims often feel no pain and see no danger. The chief cause why the sin-sick are not healed, is that they are not willing to be healed. They prefer disease to health, sin to salvation. They are willing enough to escape from the infinite and everlasting consequences of their malady, but they love and cling to the disease itself. They insist upon healing themselves. *They will not* accept the divinely-commissioned Physician. *They will not* be healed at His time and in His way.

My soul, art thou truly willing to be saved from all thy sins by Jesus Christ? Art thou ready to accept Him as thy Physician just now? Let me put my case entirely into His hands, let me abide entirely by His instructions. He is willing. He is waiting. He is all-sufficient. What am I waiting for? Why do I hesitate?

Ninth.

HAVE YE UNDERSTOOD?

MATT. xiii. 51.—Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things?

OUR Lord was probably at this time at Capernaum. On the morning of this day He went out of the house in which he usually abode, and sat down by the sea of Galilee. Having been surrounded by a vast crowd, He went on board a ship and sat down, and taught the people, who "stood on the shore." On this occasion, He adopted a new mode of teaching. He had already fully manifested Himself to the Jews, both by words and deeds. And what was the result? Notwithstanding all His popularity, the great body of the nation did not understand who He was, or what He came into this world to do. The common people were moved mainly by the love of the new and the marvellous. As for the leaders, they had already combined against Him. Therefore He began to speak in parables, which served both to veil His meaning from the undiscerning, and to disclose it to all who were really seeking after truth. Having spoken in public of the sower, the tares and wheat, the mustard-seed and the leaven, He sent away the multitude, and returned to the house. In the even-

ing, His disciples having gathered around Him, He explained these things to them, and then added the parable of the hid treasure, the pearl, and the net, and concluded by asking, "Have ye understood all these things?" They replied, no doubt with truth, "Yea, Lord."

Why did our Lord put this question? It may have been to give His disciples an opportunity to state any difficulty which they might have. He intimates His readiness to remove doubts or darkness. The greatest of all teachers was also the most patient, considerate, and condescending. He was at the utmost pains to be understood. He adapted His instructions to the meanest capacity. He revealed them to babes. He gave line upon line, and precept upon precept—here a little and there a little. He taught the profoundest truths in the plainest words. His sayings were so simple that they were the occasion of stumbling to the mighty and the wise.

This question was doubtless designed to stir up His disciples to greater diligence in the pursuit of Christian knowledge. They had truly answered that they understood all the parables we have mentioned. The Master intimates in the next verse, that while their information was correct so far as it went, it was by no means complete or exhaustive. Many new and deeper meanings of these parables remained to be discovered. Those who have studied Divine truth most profoundly, for the longest time, and with the greatest success, have been ever the readiest to confess how little they knew compared to what might have been known. The words of God are like unto Himself, they cannot be sought out unto perfection. The great subject of

Scripture is the Infinite God, and therefore it is inexhaustible as the unfathomable ocean. Such is the wonderful fulness of the doctrines of Jesus Christ, that while they are level to the feeblest understanding, and afford food for babes, they contain depths which the greatest intellect cannot fathom. As one has said, "the Scriptures have fords where a lamb may wade, and depths where an elephant may swim." "The gospels are like a cabinet of jewels, full of secret recesses: when we have pulled out one drawer after another, have examined it on all sides, and think we have got to the end, many more still remain. If we look closer and search further, we shall assuredly make rich discoveries." Therefore it is alike the duty and privilege of all men, humbly, prayerfully, thoughtfully, and diligently to study the statements of Scripture with the view fully to understand their meaning.

The themes of which the Bible treats are as much above the things handled in other books as the heaven is higher than the earth. They are such as these: the Existence, Purposes, Perfections, and Providence of Jehovah; the Incarnation, Life, Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and Intercession of the Son of God; the Divinity, Personality, and Indwelling of the Holy Ghost; the way of Salvation; Death, Judgment, and Eternity. What topics can be more excellent and sublime? To make these things known to men, God separated the people of Israel from all the other nations of the world. He established among them a magnificent system of symbolic worship. He raised up a long succession of teachers, inspired by the Holy Ghost; and last of all He sent His only begotten Son. What could more strikingly show the infinite importance of

this knowledge? These are the things which it most concerns us to know. Unless we are properly acquainted with them, our souls cannot be saved. They have occupied the thoughts of all the greatest and best men that ever lived. These are the things which the angels desire to look into. They are the themes of endless contemplation and rejoicing in the world above.

Is it a shame to a man not to know his own trade, business, or profession? What do we think of a soldier that does not understand the art of war? Of a sailor who is ignorant of navigation? Of an astronomer who cannot name the stars? Of a geologist who cannot classify rocks? Of a lawyer who knows nothing of law? Of a physician who cannot count the pulse? And what shall we say of a Christian who does not understand Christianity? Does the New Testament mean nothing when it calls the Christian a disciple, or scholar? Does it not declare that every follower of Jesus is bound to consider it his work, business, and profession to acquire the knowledge of God?

Unless I understand, how can I profit by the word read and preached? It might as well be in an unknown tongue. Unless I understand the truths of religion, I am destitute of that faith by which the soul is saved; for how can I trust Him whom I do not know? Unless I understand, I am without that love which is the sum of the whole law of God; for how can I give my heart to a stranger? Unless I study these things, I am guilty of perverting the highest faculty God has given. Reason is man's noblest power. It is the gift by which he is distinguished from the inferior animals, and it cannot be appropriately exercised except in acquiring the knowledge of God. The Master would stir us up to

grow in the knowledge of Divine truth. We should not always be learning the alphabet of Christian science. Let us climb the heights of sacred truth. We are not to be always content with the milk of childhood; but to desire the strong meat of full-grown men. We are not to be always creeping along the shore of the ocean of truth; we are to launch forth into the deep. If a rich gold-field were at my door, would I deem it enough to gather only that which would furnish me with the necessaries of life? Would I not rather endeavour to obtain as much as I could? Should I less laboriously and diligently seek after that knowledge, which is infinitely better than gold, rubies, and pearls? Can I know too much of God and of Jesus Christ? The more I know of them, the more like unto them I become, and the greater the amount of my holiness and happiness.

This question, moreover, was put in order to remind the disciples of Jesus Christ of the use they were to make of the knowledge they had received. It was imparted, not that it might be selfishly retained; but on very purpose that it might be communicated to others. The Christian is to consider himself as a householder or head of a family, who has to supply the wants of all entrusted to his care. He must be continually laying up a store of provisions. He must have a stock always on hand. He must bring forth his supplies with all prudence, as occasion may require, and according to the varied condition and circumstances of men. He must have both abundance and variety: "things new and old." The mind of the pastor, or parent, or teacher, or private Christian who would discharge his duties aright, must be furnished

with all kinds of Christian knowledge and experience: he must be ready at any moment to defend, to explain, or to apply Divine truth; to instruct the ignorant; to warn the erring; to rebuke the ungodly; to encourage the timid; to comfort the sorrowful. What need, then, of knowledge and wisdom, patience and prayer!

"If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." Prov. ii. 3, 4, 5.

Almighty God! Thy word is cast
  Like seed upon the ground:
Oh! may it grow in humble hearts,
  And righteous fruits abound.

Let not the foe of Christ and man
  This holy seed remove;
But give it root in praying souls
  To bring forth fruits of love.

Let not the world's deceitful cares
  The rising plant destroy;
But may it in converted minds
  Produce the fruits of joy.

Let not Thy word, so kindly sent
  To raise us to Thy throne,
Return to Thee, and sadly tell
  That we reject Thy Son.

Great God! come down, and on Thy word
  Thy mighty power bestow:
That all who hear the joyful sound
  Thy saving grace may know.

JOHN ATWOOD.

Tenth.

WHAT WILT THOU?

MARK X. 51.—Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?

OUR Lord, accompanied by a vast crowd of pilgrims, is setting out from Jericho. Bartimeus—a well-known blind man, is sitting by the road-side begging. Hearing the noise of a multitude, he asked what it meant. He is told Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. As soon as he heard this, calling to mind the wonderful things told of Him, especially the cure of a blind man at Jerusalem, Bartimeus began to cry out with a loud voice, "Thou son of David, have mercy on me." Those that followed Jesus commanded him to hold his peace. They think it a most unseemly thing, that the triumphal procession of their glorious king,—for such was the thought of their heart at this time—should be disturbed and interrupted by the rude and clamorous cries of a beggar. But Bartimeus had too deep a sense of the value of the opportunity he now enjoyed; he was too much in earnest to be put to silence. Therefore he cried out more loudly and vehemently than before, "Thou son of David, have mercy upon me." Jesus does not consider this an interruption. He would often be interrupted in this way. This is that confession of misery, guilt, helplessness, and lowly confidence, which is never made in vain. Through

all the multitude of noises, He detects at once the cry of the earnest petitioner. He stands still and commands Bartimeus to come into His presence. The bystanders change their tone and say, Be of good comfort, rise, He calleth for thee. In a moment he rises up, throws aside the upper garment that might have hindered his progress, and hastens to cast himself at His feet. And Jesus said unto him, "what wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" What dost thou wish or desire? You have but to state what you would have, and you shall have it. Did the omniscient Redeemer not know what was the calamity under which this man groaned? He did. It was evident to all the world. Was He not aware of the desire of Bartimeus heart? and that what he sought was not an ordinary alms? Undoubtedly, and He had already resolved to restore his sight. Why then did He put this question? It was that he might more fully manifest His Father's glory; that He might awaken the man to a deeper consciousness of his misery; call forth his faith into liveliest exercise, and especially teach him, and all of us, the nature and necessity of fervent prayer.

It is of moment to bear in mind, that God has appointed a definite way in which we are to obtain His aid and deliverance. If we would receive we must ask. This is the command of God. Prayer is the means he has prescribed. And why must we pray? Is our Father in Heaven ignorant of our necessities? Does He require to be persuaded and moved by our entreaties? Is He not more willing to give, than we are to ask? Whence, then, the absolute necessity of prayer? Not to mention other reasons, it is enough to state that we could not enjoy the blessing of God without it. It is indispensable as a preparation of our hearts. Without prayer

we could neither rightly receive nor properly improve the gifts of Heaven. But this question was intended not merely to shew the necessity and importance of prayer, but also to bring out its nature. Bartimeus has already offered up the petition, "Thou son of David, have mercy upon me." It is too general, the master must have something more explicit and definite. What is the very thing you want? What is the kind of mercy you desire? Is it bodily or spiritual: pardoning or quickening; guiding or comforting mercy? Mention the exact thing you have come for. Nor is the earnest petitioner at all at a loss to reply. "Lord, that I might receive my sight." After this manner, therefore, let us order our requests, when we come before God. Let us beware of vague, general, pointless prayers. Let us be prepared to state at once, the evil we would have removed, the want we would have supplied, the promise we desire to be fulfilled. God desires particular confessions, particular petitions. Professor Hoge in his beautiful exposition of this miracle, makes mention of a pious negro, who was asked to explain the secret of his earnestness in prayer, "Oh!" said he, "I always have an errand at the throne; I just tell the Lord what I came for, and wait for an answer." Thus let us pray. What is our most crying necessity? Whatever it is, be it great or small, let us, Hezekiah-like, spread it out before the Lord.

What wilt thou, O believer, that Jesus should do unto thee? What is thy petition and it shall be granted, and thy request and it shall be performed. Dost thou desire to be delivered from the thraldom of sin? Jesus answers, sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law but under grace. Dost thou wish to be sustained amidst the temptations of Satan and of

the world? The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. You shall not be tempted more than you are able to bear. Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. Would you be comforted under some sore trial? I will not leave thee comfortless. Cast thy burden on the Lord and He shall sustain thee. Wouldst thou be kept from all evil? The Lord will preserve thee in thy going out and coming in, from this time forth, even for ever. He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust. Wouldest thou be delivered from the fear of death? He saith, O death, I will be thy plagues; O Grave I will be thy destruction. Whatever be thy necessity He is ready to meet it. Is it wisdom to guide? or power to defend? or justice to acquit? or holiness to sanctify, or love to satisfy? All these are in Jesus Christ; which of them wilt thou have? Whatever be thy condition, there is in Him that which is suited thereto. He is life to the dead and light to the blind. He is clothing to the naked, food to the hungry, and water to the thirsty; Healing to the sick, a Portion to the poor, a Prophet to the ignorant, a Priest to the guilty, a Strength to the weak, an Example to the perplexed, Rest to the weary, a Friend to the friendless, a Father to the fatherless. In all these things his question is, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?"

The language of this question implies that Jesus has all things at His disposal. There is not anything good, that He is not alike able and willing to impart. There is no limit either to His resources or to His readiness to help. His love is an ocean boundless and bottomless. In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. All power is given unto Him in heaven and on earth. He is heir of all things. He is head over all things to

His church. All things are given into His hands. In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Realize this, O believer; all the infinite abundance of God, all the blessedness of which the soul of man is capable, are yours in offer, yours in Christ. Let them become yours in actual possession. Ask and they shall be given. You cannot do Jesus a higher honour, you cannot afford Him a greater happiness, than by preferring large requests. Be not afraid to ask much, to expect much, and much you shall obtain.

In all my straits let me come boldly to the throne of grace. Let me not forget the example of Queen Esther. In her distress she ventured into the presence of a haughty man. Shall I hesitate to draw near to the God of infinite mercy. She went into the royal presence unasked and contrary to law. I am not only invited but commanded to make known my requests in prayer. She had no powerful friend at court. The greatest personage there was the deadly enemy of her race. I have an almighty Paraclete whom the Father heareth always. She obtained the desire of her heart, the half of the vast empire of Persia was placed at her disposal, and shall I be sent empty away, when the hearer of prayer setting no limit at all to my prayers, says, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?"

This language proclaims the infinite freeness with which Jesus Christ dispenses His blessing. As if he said, I hamper you with no conditions, I ask no price, no merit. Whosoever thou art, thou mayest have whatsoever thou wilt.

Eleventh.

CAN YE DRINK OF MY CUP?

MATT. xx. 22.—Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?

FOR the third time, and with greater fulness and force than before, our Lord has just foretold His fast approaching sufferings and death. Though He could not have used plainer words, the disciples did not understand what He meant. "This saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken." Nothing could make them believe that His life could either be violently taken away or willingly given up as a ransom for many. Indeed, their minds were now so full of the grand earthly empire which they expected immediately to appear, that they could hardly think of anything else. And so it was, that at this time there came to Him James and John, the sons of Zebedee, saying, "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory." A fair and equal share of place and power does not satisfy these fishermen of Galilee. Forgetful alike of the claims of others, and of their own unfitness, they seek for nothing less than the very highest honours the Lord has to bestow. They desire to be set over the heads, not only of their brethren, but of all the nearest kinsmen of

the Great King. What request could have been more selfish or unseasonable? And what was the answer of our Lord? Did He sharply reprove their unblushing ambition? Did He sternly tell them, that as long as they cherished the spirit they were now breathing forth, they should have no place at all, not to say the highest in His kingdom? Thus He might well have spoken to them. But mark His marvellous wisdom, forbearance, and gentleness; instead of severely chiding them, He tenderly invites them to consider whether or not they were able to endure the bitter sufferings that awaited Him, that awaited them, and that, in one form or other, await all previous to entrance into heavenly glory. Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? "*The cup*" is an emblem of deep and bitter inward anguish; "*the baptism*" is a figure of the extreme distress of one sunk in the bottom of a troubled sea, and overwhelmed by the waves and billows of outward affliction. Both terms refer to the awful agony and death of our Lord. In plain words, the question put to James and John is just this: Are you able to bear the evils that I bear, to engage in the warfare in which I engage, and to die the death I am about to die? I am about to endure the sorest travail of soul, are you ready to sympathize with me and to support me under it? I am soon to undergo the greatest cruelty and contempt, to be forsaken and disowned, to be condemned, scourged, and crucified as the basest of evil-doers; thus I am to be dealt with by the common people, and by all the great, wealthy, and learned men of your church and nation: when it comes to this, will you identify yourselves with me? Will you take my part, stand by me, and share the unutterable

scorn and suffering to which I shall be exposed? Will you hold out to the end? Will you die on a cross, rather than deny or dishonour me? Are you able to pass through an ordeal so unspeakably painful for my sake? Do you think yourselves sufficient for these things? Do you, or do you not, possess the requisite faith, courage, endurance, and devotion? You have shown great haste and eagerness to ensure a more than ordinary share of the ease and honours, the emoluments and triumphs, of my kingdom. Are these the only things you desire or care for? Or are you equally ambitious to take part in the cruel hardships, the fiery trials, the self-sacrificing labours that fall to my lot? Have you counted the cost? Know ye not that it is a fundamental and unchangeable law of my kingdom, that none but those that humble themselves shall be exalted; none but those that suffer with me on earth shall reign with me in heaven; none but those who bear the cross shall wear the crown?

The question put to James and John plainly declares that it is absolutely necessary, in some way or other, to drink of the same cup of which Christ drank, and to be baptized with the same baptism with which He was baptized. The same great truth is taught in all those parts of the word of God where we read of being "*crucified with Christ;*" "*planted in the likeness of His death;*" "*conformed to His death:*" of having "*fellowship with His sufferings:*" and of being made "*partakers of His sufferings.*" What is the real meaning of these words? In what sense and to what extent is it true that Christians drink of the very cup of which Christ drank, and are baptized with the very same baptism with which He was baptized? The scriptures emphatically affirm, that in

so far as they were meritorious or penal, the sufferings of our Saviour were peculiar to himself. He trode the wine-press alone. Apart from man, from angel, from Jehovah, the great sin-bearer endured not only much, or very much, but absolutely all that was necessary in order to expiate human guilt. He drained the cup of trembling to the very dregs: He left not so much as one drop for us to drink. All the waters of the baptism of avenging justice were discharged upon His devoted person; upon Him all the mighty waves and billows of wrath spent all their force and all their fury. All that suffering could do in the way of making propitiation, Christ's sufferings have done. He paid to the very last farthing all the ten thousand talents we owe to God. He did not bow His head on the cross and give up the ghost until He could say, "*It is finished.*" Therefore, in the great work of atonement—the greatest of all His works—we can take no part; in His vicarious sufferings —the highest of all His sufferings—we can have no share. He has done and endured all from beginning to end. We do not require to add even so much as one mite of our own. Blessed be God, we have merely to trust to what Jesus has done and suffered, in order to obtain pardon, peace, and eternal life.

But consider how much is involved in truly trusting in His expiation. To do this implies that we have been in agony under a sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and of deserved wrath; the sorrows of death have compassed us about, the pains of hell have got hold of us, all refuge has failed us, all our manifold services and sacrifices have ceased to afford us the slightest relief; we have pronounced against ourselves the same condemnation which Jesus endured; we have laid our hand

on the head of the bleeding Lamb of God, and have transferred to Him the entire burden of our guilty souls. In other words, we have so fully identified ourselves with our great and blessed Surety, and so thoroughly made His sufferings and death our own, that we most heartily feel and believe that we have suffered, and died, and borne the penalty of sin in His person. Having thus embraced Christ and become one with Him, henceforth we have, and we rejoice to have, fellowship with Him in all things, and therefore in His sufferings; we drink of the very same cup of which He drank, and we are baptized with the very same baptism with which He was baptized.

In the first place, like Him we shall have a baptism of outward tribulations. The godless world that suspected, slandered, and slew the Master, will not permit the faithful servant to escape without wrong and reproach. All who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. It is unavoidable. To enjoy the friendship of the Christ is to encounter the enmity of the Christless. If we would reign with Him, we must not only cease to cling to earth as our portion and home, we must not only withdraw our affections from its power and pleasures, its pomp and pride, its possessions and pursuits, but we must also regard the world as the enemy of God and of our souls, and be prepared day by day to brave its scorn, its injustice, and its hostility. To do this is to engage in the same sort of struggle, and to undergo the same kind of shame and suffering which the Son of God endured during His life, and at the awful hour of His death.

In the second place, we are to drink of the same cup of self-sacrifice of which Jesus drank. He denied him-

self, not in a few things, not in many things, but in all things. He thought nothing of His own ease, interest, or glory. He gave up all that He most loved. He gave up all that He had. He gave up himself for the sake of man's good and God's glory, and if I wish to have my part and lot with Him, I must do the same. I have no choice. The terms of Christian discipleship cannot be misunderstood. If any man will come after me, let him deny himself. I am to give up all that my natural heart holds most dear, all my sins, all my self-righteousness, mine own will, mine own enjoyment, mine own honour, and I am to present my soul, body, and spirit a living sacrifice to Him who loved me and gave himself for me. This is a duty which admits of no abatement, no reservation, no compromise; Christ will have all or nothing. To His service the whole man must be constantly devoted. To His cross every member of the body of sin, the flesh, with all its lusts and affections, must be transfixed; and, however great the agony, I am to carry on with all earnestness, and until I die, the same deadly warfare which Christ ever waged against sin and self, Satan and the world. Who is sufficient for these things? "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." Let me only realise that I have the honour to drink of the very same cup of which my Saviour drank, and that I am being baptized with the very same baptism with which He was baptized, and this will make the bitterest draught the sweetest, and the bloodiest baptism the most blessed.

Twelfth.

WHAT QUESTION YE WITH THEM?

MARK IX. 16.—And He asked the Scribes, What question ye with them?

IT is the morning after the glorious transfiguration of our Lord. Accompanied by Peter, James, and John, He is coming down from the holy mount. When they reach the place—probably some town or village at the foot of the hill—where the other apostles and disciples remained during their absence, they found them surrounded by a great crowd of people. In the midst of the multitude stands a man, who had brought his only son, a lunatic and a demoniac, to be healed. In the absence of the master, he presented his boy to the disciples. But the result was a disappointment. They were unable to effect a cure, and to cast out the evil spirit. Taking advantage of their failure, certain of the scribes set upon the disciples, and began to wrangle and dispute. They probably insinuated that this was a case that would have baffled the power of their master himself, had He been present. Jealous of the reputation of their Lord, the apostles stoutly maintain the contrary. When the dispute was at the hottest, He of whom they spake, suddenly and seasonably—as His manner ever is—appears on the scene of conflict. His form and features being still radiant with a glory and beauty brighter and more

attractive than yonder morning sun, all the people, when they beheld Him, were greatly amazed, and running to Him, saluted Him. But He regards them not. He hastens to the rescue of his timid and hard-pressed followers.* "But as when some great captain, suddenly arriving upon a field of battle, where his subordinate lieutenants have well-nigh lost the day, and brought all things into hopeless confusion, with his eye measures at once the necessities of the moment, and with no more than his presence causes the tide of victory to turn, and everything to right itself again, so it was now."† The Lord arrests the advancing and victorious foe. He addresses the scribes, and asks, "What question ye with them?" Question me. I am here to answer for them. They are mine. They are under my protection. What have you to lay to their charge? Thus does the Lord interpose in behalf of His disciples, espouse their cause, and throw down the gauntlet to their adversaries. Is it necessary to state that the scribes showed no disposition to accept His challenge? They are willing enough to set upon the weak disciples, but they shrink from an encounter with the master. His majestic presence, and calm, judicial, authoritative question, strike dismay into their cowardly hearts. They who a little while ago sought to confound others, are now in their turn speechless and confounded. "He made a pit and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made."

Our Lord's interposition in behalf of His disciples on this occasion is well fitted to remind us of His character and work as the great advocate or paraclete of His people. I have sinned against God times and ways

* Trench. † Ibid.

without number. Therefore on every side there rise up accusers and adversaries. Justice claims payment to the uttermost farthing of all the ten thousand talents that I owe. Sin cries to heaven for punishment. Satan accuses me day and night before God. Death confronts me with all its unutterable terrors and forebodings. Conscience arraigns me before the august tribunal of Him who is Judge of all. Thus there are many that question and that dispute with my soul; and what answer have I to give? I know not what to say, or what to do. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God?" "How shall a man be just before God?" This is the answer, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." He stands by His people in all difficulties, and makes our cause His own. He puts Himself between us and our adversaries, and meets all the charges they bring against us. In virtue of His blood and righteousness all our sins are freely and fully forgiven, and we are restored to the favour and friendship of God. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth—Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." To law, justice, sin, death, conscience, and Satan, my advocate says, "What question ye with them?" Question me.

Nor is it in the great emergencies of my soul alone that Jesus interposes in my behalf. He is doing so continually. The strife between Christians and scribes has not ceased. Every where the conflict between the powers of light and the powers of darkness is carried on. The might and malice of the great adversary are

not one whit abated. Although the manner of manifestation may be somewhat changed, the world's hatred of real Christianity is as deadly, its scorn as bitter, its opposition as keen, as in the days of our Lord and His apostles. The ungodly still continue to taunt and to question. But what have the champions of the faith, the soldiers of the cross to fear? He who is Almighty, all-merciful, and all-wise stands by them as their advocate or Paraclete. "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, nor divination against Israel: the Lord his God is with him, the shout of a king is among them."

Of the many contrasts found in the life of Jesus Christ, the one disclosed to our view in this part of Scripture is the most striking. Yesterday He walked on the earth in homeliest attire, His face more marred than any man's, and His form than the sons of men. To-day He is most gloriously transfigured, so that His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment became exceeding white, "so as no fuller on earth can white them." At this hour He is on the summit of the mount of glory; at the next He is in the vale of tears. Then He is absorbed in rapt contemplation, and holding high and direct converse with the most exalted of departed saints. Now He is enduring the contradiction of sinners, annoyed by the din of controversy, and engaged in conflict with the spirits of darkness. Who so well-qualified to sympathise with His people, amidst all the sudden and manifold changes of life, as He who passed through so many and so great vicissitudes?

Mark, too, how diverse is the condition of the different members of the same family of God. Three apostles are with Jesus on the bright mountain-top.

Nine are left alone in the dark valley below. The former enjoy the highest manifestation of the Master's glory; the latter are surrounded by perils, and exercised in the most painful conflicts. It is important to observe that in the one case, as well as in the other, there is need of watchfulness and prayer. The three and the nine alike are exposed to temptation—the former to contemplative inaction, the latter to doubt and unbelief.

Whatever be my condition, let me cling firmly to my beloved Saviour, and refuse to let Him go. How soon is His absence felt! It is when I am distant from Him that I betray His cause—that I fail to succeed in the cure of souls, and furnish adversaries with occasion to cavil and to blaspheme.

"Why should I fear the darkest hour,
Or tremble at the tempter's power?
Jesus vouchsafes to be my tower.

When creature comforts fade and die,
Worldlings may weep, but why should I?
Jesus still lives, and still is nigh.

I know not what may soon betide,
Or how my wants shall be supplied;
But Jesus knows, and will provide.

Though sin would fill me with distress,
The throne of grace I dare address,
For Jesus is my righteousness.

Though faint my prayers, and cold my love,
My stedfast hope shall not remove,
While Jesus intercedes above.

Against me earth and hell combine,
But on my side is power divine;
Jesus is all, and He is mine."

JOHN NEWTON.

Thirteenth.

HOW LONG IS IT SINCE THIS CAME?

MARK ix. 21.—How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, of a child.

OUR attention is now directed, not to the scribes, but to the broken-hearted father and his still more wretched son, who are standing in the midst of the crowd, and on whom every eye is now fixed. Look at that child. What a frightful sight! Out of the place of woe where will you find a more miserable object. His body is worn down to the veriest skeleton. His skin is wan and shrivelled like that of an old man. The child is afflicted with Epilepsy, one of the most distressing distempers that flesh is heir to, and which changes its force with the changes of the moon. He is seized with dreadful fits, that come upon him suddenly, and last for a long time. The body is racked and torn with convulsions: the poor sufferer falls down, foams at the mouth, gnashes in the most horrible manner with his teeth, until his strength is entirely exhausted, when he pines, languishes, and swoons away. In addition to this frightful natural distemper, the child is possessed of a peculiarly cruel and malignant spirit, which has deprived him of hearing and

speech. This demon aggravates all the symptoms of the disease, and oftentimes casts him into the fire and into the water. Realize all this, if you can, and remember moreover that the sufferer is an only son, and you may have some conception of the misery which now stood in full view of the Saviour. The Mighty Master beheld the disease when it was at its height, and in its most malignant form; for as soon as He commanded the patient to be brought, the demon, as if aware of the doom that awaited him, and that his time was short, resolved to die hard, and to put forth all his strength and spite. Straightway the spirit tore him, and "he falls on the ground and wallowed foaming." The paroxysm is agonizing in the extreme, and it must have filled the tender and sensitive heart of Jesus with unutterable pain and horror. Yet He does not, as one would expect, immediately bring it to an end. He delays to relieve the most excruciating pain and suffering. And why? It was in order to bring His disciples, and especially the father of the child, to a right state of mind. It was to teach them and all men everywhere, that the intensest agony of body is greatly less to be dreaded than an unbelieving spirit. It was to show the indispensable necessity of faith. With these ends in view, He asked the father of the child, "How long is it ago since this came unto him?" He replied, since he was a child. The appalling calamity was of long standing, and therefore all the more distressing and difficult to remove. In the mysterious providence of the All-wise God, it dated from the birth of the sufferer. Does any one expect the removal of a constitutional infirmity, or of one that has existed from infancy? Who thinks of consulting a physician in such a case? Accordingly, the words em-

ployed by the father of this child (if thou canst do anything), show that he had scarcely any hope of anything being done for the child. But why did he bring the child to Jesus at all, if he did not expect or half-expect to obtain deliverance? It was to strengthen this faint hope; to inspire the father with the greater confidence; to increase his faith, and at the same time to lead him and us to realize the full extent of the difficulty; to show how it transcended all merely human power, and thus to qualify him and us to appreciate the greatness and glory of the miracle about to be done; that our Lord put this question. Jesus did not require to ask for his own information, how inveterate and long continued this disease and possession had been.

Blessed be his name there is no disease so deeply seated or long established as to baffle the Great Physician. Eneas had kept his bed and was sick of the palsy eight years. One woman had suffered many things for twelve years, another was bound with the spirit of infirmity eighteen years. One man had been unable to walk thirty-eight, and another forty years. As this child was a lunatic and a demoniac, another had been blind, from birth. But in every case there was the same glorious result. He healed them all. Every one of them, without any exception, received a most gracious welcome, and experienced a perfect recovery.

And so it is still with regard to the disease of the soul. Whosoever cometh He will not, no, He will not cast out. But it is of infinite importance to observe the order that was invariably followed, the method that was always pursued by the Healer. In no case was help given or cure effected, until the sufferer, or, as in the case before us, his representative, was awakened fully to

a sense of his miserable condition; and to the absolute necessity of confiding in Jesus alone. Thus we are taught how the malady of the soul is to be removed. There is an inseparable connection between repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Without conviction of sin, a keen sense of personal guilt, the Saviour's character and claims can neither be understood, nor cordially recognized. Can the heart be bound up before it is broken? Can the merciful Jesus heal my wound so slightly that the core of the disease will remain? The probing, lancing, and other severities of the surgeon's hand, so far from being the wounds of an enemy, are as useful and as necessary a part of his merciful work as the application of healing medicine. Have we never heard of limbs requiring to be broken a second time because they were not thoroughly broken at first? In like manner, He who is the Gospel, began by preaching the Law. Before He cured He always catechised. Let me ponder the lesson thus suggested. Do we not hear the same physician asking about that disease, which plagues us and all the world: how long is it ago since this came unto them?

How do we explain the fact, that in every part of the world, in every period of history, and in every variety of condition, all men are guilty, not of one act, but of countless acts of sin? Why do these trees, wherever planted, in whatever way cultivated, no matter what the kind of soil, what the sort of situation, always yield bad fruit? Why is there a greater number of evil than of good actions? Why does sin preponderate in every individual? How does sin maintain its influence over me, notwithstanding law and gospel, mercy and judgment, penalties and precepts, prayers and privileges?

How does it come to pass that children begin to do evil as soon as they are able to do anything? Who taught Cain to rebel against God, to despise the promised Saviour, and to embrue his hands in his brother's blood? Was it his father or his mother, or who was it? What is the answer to these questions? How do we explain these matters of fact? Let men say what they will of the innocence of childhood or the dignity of manhood; if we are to believe the evidence of our senses, the records of history, and the testimony of the God of truth, we are all thoroughly depraved from our birth.

Look at that babe lying in sweet repose on its mother's bosom. It is not indeed bodily, but what is infinitely more dreadful, it is spiritually possessed. That young heart bears the impress of the Wicked One. It is under the influence of cruel and evil propensities, so deeply seated that no power on earth can root them out. That heart by nature is fickle and changeable as the moon. The evil spirit of sin will tear and rend, harass and distract it, by means of passion and pride, envy and jealousy, anger and remorse. It will make it deaf to all the entreaties of loving friends and pastors and parents; and dumb with regard to praise and prayer and all good. Brought within sight and hearing of Jesus, if the grace of God prevent not, the heart will wallow and struggle with all the fury of a demon. It will rush into follies and vices as contrary to one another as fire and water: and at last it will cast soul and body into Hell. Let the Christian parent mark the example of this father. He could say, Master, I have brought my son unto thee. Have you done this? Have you often taken your child in the arms of your faith, and put him into Christ's arms? This man hoped against hope.

He cried out with tears for mercy for his child. Have you wrestled and prayed in like manner? Did he make all these efforts to obtain the removal of a bodily disease? What, then, should you do to obtain the healing of the soul of your child?

Fourteenth.

WHENCE SHALL WE BUY BREAD?

JOHN vi. 5.—He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?

MARK vi. 38.—How many loaves have ye?

THE twelve apostles have recently returned from a toilsome missionary journey, and stand greatly in need, alike of rest of body, and repose of spirit. Our Lord has just heard of the martyrdom of His friend and faithful forerunner, John the Baptist. In this untimely and most painful event He could not fail to see a foreshadowing of His approaching death. Hence His sorrowful and troubled spirit also longed for a few quiet hours of prayer and communion with God. Therefore He said unto the apostles, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat." He resolved to withdraw from the bustle and excitement of Capernaum, and to retire to an uninhabited region belonging to Bethsaida, a city situated at the entrance of the river Jordan into the Lake of Gennesaret. The place which he sought has been identified in our own time. It is a romantic solitude shut in by mountain, river, and lake, at the south-eastern corner of the plain of Butaiha. They desired to depart privately, but they were disappointed. The multitude observed their

preparations, saw them embark, and in great numbers followed the course of the ship. As they could travel the distance on foot, as speedily as the boat could sail, they "outwent" our Lord and His disciples, and arrived at the place before them. Although His purpose was thus in the meantime defeated, Jesus manifested no impatience.

Very different was the feeling of His heart. When He saw the great multitude, He was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd, and He spake unto them of the Kingdom of God and healed them that had need of healing. Thus the Great Teacher and Physician was occupied all day long. So great were His delight and diligence in His work, that the hours passed away uncounted, and all thought of Himself was forgotten. So keen was the relish of the crowd for the spiritual dainties set before them, that bodily hunger for a time ceased to be felt. It was not until the shadows of evening began to fall, that other thoughts arose in their minds. The day is far spent. The sun is going down. Here in a desert place,—far from their homes, and from any town or village,—are not fewer than five thousand men besides women and children,—all hungry, faint, and without food, "They have nothing to eat." What an emergency! What is to be done? "Send the multitude away," say the disciples, "that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread." To the eye of sense, it seemed to be not only the best, but the only thing that could be done. But our God and Saviour seeth not as man seeth, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Send

them away to buy, say the disciples. But Jesus said (how striking the contrast) they need not depart, give them to eat.

Whatever others may say or do, blessed Lord, thou wilt never send away from thee, even one man, woman or child—not to say thousands in destitution and darkness. When didst thou dismiss any one empty and hungry from thy presence? "The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thy hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." Thou hast healed all the diseases of the multitude. All day long thou hast been filling their souls with spiritual food. Hast thou not fully done thy part? What more could they desire or expect? But thou givest exceeding abundantly above all that we can either ask or think. Thou art neither wearied nor impoverished by giving. Thou suppliest the lowest as well as the highest of our wants. Thou carest and providest for the body as well as the soul. It was to teach this, as well as other things, that thou didst ask Philip "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? How many loaves have ye?"

Why this question was put to Philip, rather than to any of the other apostles, we know not. It may have been because this disciple was standing nearest to Jesus at the moment, or had charge of the provisions, or had given way to undue anxiety in a greater degree than the rest, or because he was peculiarly slow of understanding, and weak of faith. We believe he belonged to this part of the Holy Land, and therefore was better acquainted than any of his companions could be with the resources of the district. He could tell whether there was any town or village within a reasonable distance, that could

furnish bread sufficient to satisfy the hunger of five thousand men, besides women and children. He could appreciate the difficulty of the case.

This question was not asked because Jesus was at any loss or stood in need of any knowledge men could give. He Himself knew what He was about to do. "This He said to prove Philip." The word rendered "prove" means to try, to test, in order to make manifest the true character. Has Philip faith in his Master's ability to meet this emergency? Does he stand the test thus applied? Does he reply, Lord thou canst furnish a table in the wilderness. Thou hast but to open thy hand and put forth thy power, and verily this multitude shall be fed, although it were ten thousand times larger than it is. Alas, when proved Philip does not abide the proof. Long time has this man been with Jesus. Many wonderful works has he witnessed. Only yesterday he returned from a long journey, to which he went forth, without silver or gold, or scrip, or purse, or staff, or shoes, without any preparation at all, and he lacked nothing. Every want was supplied, every fear was disappointed, but all this is forgotten already. He is utterly at a loss. He still leans on an arm of flesh. It never once enters into his mind to look to Him whose power and love had never hitherto failed. He can think only of natural means and human deliverers. Reader, let your conscience testify whether Philip was singular in this respect. When tried, have you always stood the test?

Jesus had recourse to this questioning, not for His own sake, but for the sake of Philip. It was to prove this man. It was to show him his weakness and unbelief, and thus to humble and to stir him up to pray for increase of faith. Without proving, self-knowledge is

impossible, self-deception is inevitable. If God had not tried and proved the ancient Israelites in the wilderness, or His servant Job, or Hezekiah in the business of the ambassadors of the King of Babylon,—they would never have suspected the existence of the evils that lurked unseen in their hearts. So it is still. Therefore we are constantly tried and proved, and this in ways innumerable, by means of prosperity and adversity, by health and sickness, by natural temperament and social intercourse, by the business, honours and pleasures of life, that our hidden purposes and principles may be made known to ourselves, that our sincerity may be tested, our faith strengthened, our Christian character developed and matured. The Lord proved Philip in order to prepare him and the rest to appreciate the wonderful work about to be performed.

It is not until we have been reduced to extremities and awakened to a full consciousness thereof, and have waited long in vain, and have been led to despair of help from every other source, that Jesus is wont to reveal His power and love. He is a Saviour in a desperate case. It is when we feel this most deeply, that we embrace Him most thankfully, and cling to Him most firmly.

Fifteenth.

OUGHT NOT CHRIST TO SUFFER?

LUKE xxiv. 26. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?

WAS it not fit and necessary that the Messiah should suffer and die, and thus enter into His glory? When we thoughtfully consider on the one hand the infinite meritoriousness, and on the other the unparalleled sufferings and death of the Son of God, can we refrain from asking how are these things to be reconciled? Was this person dealt with according to justice? Was this what he deserved? If He were a mere man, who stood only in a private and personal relation to God, we can come to no other conclusion than that He ought not to have suffered. In that case He would have been treated with cruelty and injustice, not only by men, but also by God. It is however impossible to believe that the judge of all the earth can inflict upon any one whatever, even one unlawful or unnecessary pang, much less could He deal thus with His only begotten and well beloved Son. Nevertheless, we read in Holy Scripture, "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him and to put Him to grief," Isa. liii. 13, see also Zech. xiii. 7. Therefore, since God can be neither cruel nor unjust, there must have been some reason apart from His ordinary method of procedure, which rendered the sufferings and death of His Son consistent with the rectitude of His character and government. What was this reason?

It was necessary that Christ should suffer and die, that

all things might be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Him, Luke xxiv. 44. The sufferings and death of Jesus are implied in the first promise, Gen. iii. 15, they are the substance of all the ancient types, shadows and sacrifices, they are so fully and minutely foretold by the Old Testament writers, that their statements resemble history rather than prophecy. It was predicted that Jesus should be forsaken of "lovers and friends, Ps. xxxviii. 2, that He should be betrayed by His "own familiar friend," Ps. xli. 9, "sold for thirty pieces of silver," Zech. xi. 13, "numbered with transgressors," Isa. liii. 12, "accused by false witnesses," Ps. xxxv. 2, "railed at by His enemies," Ps. xxii. 7, 8, His hands and feet were to be pierced, Ps. xxii. 16, His raiment distributed by lot, Ps. xxii. 18, vinegar was to be given Him to drink, Ps. lxix. 21, His sufferings were to be violent and varied, manifold and mortal, Isa. liii. 4, 5, 8, He was to be forsaken of his father, Ps. xxii. 1, and at the last these words were to fall from His lips, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit," Ps. xxxi. 5. "Thus it was written and thus it behoved Christ to suffer." But why was it thus written? Why did the Spirit testify beforehand of the sufferings of Christ? What are these Scriptures? They are simply the declarations of the will of Christ. Therefore, when we affirm that Christ must needs suffer, for so it was foretold, this is just to assert that He was bound to suffer because He had willingly offered and engaged, promised and pledged so to do, He could not be under any necessity except that which He imposed on Himself. Therefore the question returns, why did Jesus lay this burden on Himself?

It was necessary that Christ should suffer and die, in order to render the salvation of guilty men consistent with the essential justice and rightful honours of the moral Governor of the Universe. The same sacred oracle that reveals God as a Father, declares that He is Supreme Lord, Law-giver and King, Dan. iv. 25, 34, 35; Psalm lxviii. 6, ciii. 13, cvii. 39, 41; Acts xvii. 25, 26, 28. What would be thought of an earthly Ruler who enacted the best laws and annexed to them just penalties, but who thereafter took no cognizance of insult and offences committed against his person and government, who received into his Court with equal favour the infamous traitor, the red-handed rebel, who had filled the realm with sedition and bloodshed, and the loyal subject, who had supported law and order at the risk of his life? Could men respect, love and obey such a prince? Carry out the principle suggested. In the exercise of His sovereign right the King of kings has enacted a law. This law is neither arbitrary nor oppressive. It is based on right and wrong. It is summed up in one word—justice; rendering to God and to man what is due. It is fitted in every way to promote our highest interests and happiness. It is holy just and good. To this law God has annexed, as He was justly entitled to do, the penalty of death. "The wages of sin is death," Rom. vi. 23. We have broken the law. In consequence of this what is our position? We have incurred the penalty. We are liable to everlasting punishment. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 10. How, then, is God to deal with us? Can He allow His law and authority to be trampled in the dust with impunity? Can He be regardless of His

eternal Truth and Justice. Heaven and earth may pass away, but His word shall never pass away, and if that word has any meaning it declares that He is a Being of absolute Justice, and that therefore it is essential to Him to cherish a calm, constant, deliberate, disposition or determination to punish sin according to its deserts, Hab. i. 13. Josh. xxiv. 19, Exod. xxxiv. 7, Isa. xxxiii. 14, Ps. v. 4, 6, Rom. i. 32, 2 Thess. i. 6, Rev. xvi. 56. Such being the case, the only alternatives seem to be, either all of us must be consigned to everlasting misery, or some one must be found whose sufferings will compensate for the wrongs and insults of which we have been guilty. Such an one is the Christ. Though He was in the form of God, and counted it no robbery to be equal with God, He became man, subjected Himself to the law to which we are bound, perfectly obeyed all its commandments and endured its penalty, and thus He delivered us from its bondage and curse, and introduced us to the glorious liberty of the Sons of God. His sufferings and death were undergone in the same nature that sinned; they were perfectly voluntary; they were endured by one who had no sin of His own to answer for, by one who was God, and therefore Lord of His own life—entitled to lay it down and take it up again; and hence they were in every respect fitted to vindicate, and did fully vindicate the insulted rights of the most high God.

That this great result was actually thus achieved is manifest from the fact, that to the sufferings and death of Christ, and to them alone, do the New Testament writers invariably attribute pardon of sin, propitiation, reconciliation, atonement, redemption and peace with God. To the blood—to the cross—of Christ alone we are indebted for deliverance from the law and from sin,

from death and from hell, neither the example nor the doctrine of our Lord, nor ought else but this, is ever once mentioned as the procuring cause of the blessings of salvation.

It was necessary that Christ should suffer and die, in order to pacify the awakened conscience of guilty man. When I am fully conscious of my guilt, and realize the solemn reckoning awaiting me in Eternity, do I find it easy to believe in the forgiveness of sin? I feel it to be most difficult. Will it relieve my distress to learn that the Almighty may somehow save me? Will it satisfy me to hear general statements regarding His infinite mercy? I want to know how He can pardon me in consistency with His justice. My conscience craves not only for some suffering, or some sacrifice for my sins, but also for that which is as great as my guilt. Where can such reparation be found? It has been sought everywhere, and always in vain. The same loud and bitter cry continues to be heard, "Wherewithal shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most High God? Shall I come with thousands of rams or tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" It is only when I heartily believe that God so loved guilty men, that He sent His only begotten Son to be a propitiation for their sins, it is only when I trust entirely in His atonement, that I find rest for my soul.

It was necessary that Christ should suffer and die, in order to secure and promote holiness. What is holiness? It is the devotion of the whole soul to the service and glory of God. And how is this to be obtained? What will induce me to forsake all sin, and to render to God the greatest amount and highest degree of obedience? Is it the

dread of punishment? the desire to propitiate? the sense of duty or the like? None of these can kindle one spark of generous warmth in my heart. The only thing to do this is love or gratitude. And what so well fitted to awaken love, as the love manifested in the sufferings and death of Christ? Overwhelmed beneath the awful load of guilt, I behold the very God I have offended, putting Himself in my place and laying down His life to save my soul. Believing this, I am filled with unutterable joy and peace, gratitude and love, I feel I owe everything to the death of Christ, I can never think enough of it, I return to it again and again with ever increasing delight, and as often as I return not only do I feel He has every claim to my duty and affection, but I also receive in and through Him the Holy Spirit who is the only Author and Sustainer of true holiness.

We are here invited to meditate not only on the sufferings of Christ, but also on the glory that followed. What is this glory? It is the honour and majesty that now belong to Him as Mediator. Words cannot describe the greatness of the homage and devotion which He rendered to God during His sojourn on earth. His services and sacrifices were of the most transcendent merit. There is nothing in Heaven or Earth to which they can be compared. Therefore Jehovah could not fail to regard Him with ineffable delight, and crown Him with the highest rewards He could bestow. He hath set Him at His own right hand, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that which is to come. He hath put all things under His feet, and made Him Head over all things to His Church. Let us rejoice that Christ has not only suffered for us,

but that He also reigns with almighty and universal sway in our nature and name and for our sake. Therefore neither sin with all its deformity and deceit, nor the world with all its flatteries and frowns, nor Satan with all his mighty and malicious hosts, nor death with all its darkness and dismay, can endanger the safety of our souls.

Sixteenth.

WHY WEEPEST THOU?

JOHN xx. 15.—Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?

THESE are probably the first words that Jesus uttered after He rose from the dead. It was Mary Magdalene, and not the "Virgin" Mary, who enjoyed the great honour and happiness of meeting for the first time with the risen Redeemer. It was a woman and not a man that was chosen to be the first witness and herald of the resurrection. Why was Mary Magdalene favoured above all living? The foregoing part of this chapter furnishes the answer. Who was last at the cross, and first at the tomb of Jesus? Who was most eager, even before the dawn of day, to hasten from her home to show her reverence and love to the dead body of her Lord? When the hallowed remains could nowhere be found, who felt the loss most deeply? Who wept most bitterly? When all others went away, who waited and lingered alone at the sacred spot? Who asks every passer-by, whither is my beloved gone? Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth? Tell me where thou hast laid Him. Who now gave proof of the greatest courage and constancy? Who felt the deepest anguish, the sorest distress? Beyond all doubt it was Mary Magdalene. Therefore it was to her that Jesus first showed Himself. Observe, however, the terms of this question. He does not call her by name as He was wont to do. He does not say "Mary," but He says "woman," why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? Had the wish of her heart been granted, and

had she found the body of Jesus in the sepulchre, then truly, she and all of us might have wept and wept for ever. He feels for her grief, but He is vexed that she should so grieve. Therefore, like Joseph to his brethren, He made Himself strange unto her, and spake roughly unto her. She had manifested the rarest and strongest love; but had forgotten that he had plainly foretold, that He would rise from the dead on the third day. And although she is now gazing into His empty tomb, and standing in full view of many things well fitted to stir up her memory, and to awaken the belief that the great event of which her Master had so often spoken, had indeed come to pass; yet to all this she is strangely blind. She is slow of heart to believe. Therefore she is most bitterly bewailing a sad and painful death at the very moment when she ought to have been rejoicing, even with joy unspeakable, in a most glorious resurrection. For had He not risen as He had declared, from the dead on the third day, Jesus Christ would have been a false witness. The crowning and conclusive proof of His Messiahship would have been awanting. His whole life would have been a lie. The Sun of Righteousness would have gone down in darkness and tempest, to rise no more. Man's forlorn hope having perished, there is nothing before him but desolation and despair; there is nothing in store for this woman, and for all born of woman, but to weep, and wail, and fear for evermore. But inasmuch as the Lord has risen as He said, why does this woman weep? Is this a time to mourn and to lament? Is it not rather a time to dance and to sing before the Lord? Is it not the most joyful day the world ever saw? The Lord is risen indeed. He is standing even now at thy right hand, although thou

knowest it not. Woman, why then weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? Wipe away thy tears. Rejoice with all thine heart and soul in thy risen Lord. For what does the empty sepulchre of Jesus proclaim? It tells you that all the travail and toil, all the trials and tears, of thy beloved are over and gone. All His words and deeds, all His services and sacrifices are publickly stamped with the great seal of Heaven. The most stupendous work the world ever saw is not only perfectly completed, but crowned. Every barrier and hindrance that might have stood between us and everlasting bliss is taken out of the way. All the claims of the law and justice of God are satisfactorily met. Full atonement is made for the guilt of the world. Sin is finished. Death has received its death-blow. The spoiler is spoiled. Satan is conquered. The darkness and gloom of the grave are driven away as by the rising of a sun, that shall never set. Behold the pledge and pattern of the resurrection of all that fall asleep in Jesus. Lo the veil of the temple is rent asunder. The gates of mercy are thrown wide open to all mankind. "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, the good-will of Heaven to men." Are all these glorious and joyful things, and many more than can be named or counted, bound up with the resurrection of Jesus? How unseasonable and unseemly, then, were the tears and fears of Mary Magdalene! Can we wonder that the Lord should enquire with a tone of reproach, Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? But He does nothing more than give a gentle and faithful hint, for He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. His great purpose in putting this question, undoubtedly was, not to wound afresh, but tenderly to bind up this broken

and bleeding heart. For our good Lord is not stern and unrelenting. He is not easily provoked. He is not ready to take offence. He knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust. He has compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way. He is very gentle and pitiful, very meek and merciful, very patient and forbearing. The Risen Redeemer is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. He was Himself compassed about with infirmities. He was the man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He was in all points tempted as we are, therefore He feels for us and He feels with us in all our weaknesses and wanderings, in all our dangers and distresses, in all our complaints and conflicts. We grieve Him in every way. We try and tempt Him to the utmost; there is no end to our slights and suspicions; our provocations are beyond reckoning, and lack nothing that is fitted to be displeasing and dishonouring to our Master. Were we to act towards our fellows as we act towards Him, they would say this is beyond endurance, and truly it is wonderful that even the meek and merciful Jesus does not lose patience with us, and utterly reject and cast us off for ever. Yet blessed be His name He still bears with us, and forgives seventy times seven.

The time of our extremity is the time of His opportunity. When all refuge fails, when we are in the depths, cast down and discouraged, Jesus comes to us, as to Mary Magdalene, and with the greatest tenderness asks, brother, sister, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? Whence this question? Does He need to be told why we weep, and what we seek? There is no feeling, there is no fear in our hearts which He does not know. But He asks that He may comfort us, that He may lead us to unburden to Him our hearts.

Reader, art thou seeking Jesus as early, as earnestly, as perseveringly as this woman? The grave clothes, the sepulchre, the very angels of Heaven, could not satisfy the heart of Mary Magdalene. She must have Jesus Himself. Is it so with you also? Will no outward ordinance, will neither sermon nor sacrament, nor anything, however sacred, content your soul unless it bring you to the Saviour?

Compared with Christ in all beside
  No comeliness I see;
The one thing needful, dearest Lord,
  Is to be one with Thee.
The sense of Thy expiring Love
  Into my soul convey;
Thyself bestow: for Thee alone
  I absolutely pray.

Whatever else Thy will withholds,
  Here grant me to succeed!
O let Thyself my portion be,
  And I am blest indeed!
Less than Thyself will not suffice
  My comfort to restore;
More than Thyself I cannot have;
  And Thou canst give no more.

TOPLADY.

Seventeenth.

WHAT COMMUNICATIONS ARE THESE?

LUKE xxiv. 17.—And He said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk and are sad?

THIS question was put to the two disciples, who were going to Emmaus, on the afternoon of that glorious day on which our Lord rose from the dead. These men are returning home in sadness. Very bitter is their disappointment. They have given up all for lost. The crucifixion of their Master, so dreadful and unexpected, has proved a death-blow to their most fondly cherished hopes. The only thing which prevents them from giving way altogether to despair is that this morning, before leaving Jerusalem, strange tidings have reached their ears. Some of their fellow-disciples who had visited the sepulchre in which Jesus had been buried, had found it open and empty. Moreover, a vision of angels had been seen, who affirmed that Jesus had risen from the dead. But, as the Lord himself had not yet been seen, these two disciples are still in darkness and doubt. They do not know what to think or what to do. They hope and fear by turns, and as they walk along the way, they are eagerly canvassing the subject in all its bearings; they are communing and reasoning the one with the other; they are doing what in them lies to arrive at the truth. When they were in this condition, and employed in this way, Jesus drew near to them, although they knew him not. He began at once to converse with them, He led them to tell Him all that was in their hearts, He in-

quired what was the subject they were discussing with so much keenness. Why are ye troubled? Why hath sorrow filled your hearts? He knew well the cause of their distress and perplexity. But He must needs hear it from their own lips, otherwise he would not have a suitable opening for the entrance of instruction and comfort.

The subject of their communications one to another, was "the things which had come to pass in Jerusalem in those days, concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a Prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: and how the chief priests, our rulers, delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him." When we realize the awful circumstances in which they had been placed, and the nature of the opinions they held with regard to the Messiahship, we cannot wonder that they were amazed and overwhelmed with the death of their Master. Three days ago, they witnessed a spectacle, which, considered in itself, is the deepest and darkest, the strangest and most unaccountable the world ever saw. They beheld a person possessed of immaculate innocence, endowed with absolute perfection, enduring the severest possible sufferings. Is the existence of pain, in a world created and governed by a Being of infinite wisdom and love, a great mystery? Is the agony of an infant a dark and dreadful thing? How much more inscrutable and staggering are the indescribable bodily sufferings and mental anguish of the spotless Son of God?

The perplexity of these men, though natural, was not justifiable. Their anxiety and alarm arose entirely from their ignorance and unbelief. Had they perceived even the general bearing of the Scriptures, read in their

synagogues every Sabbath day, and the meaning of the rites and symbols of the religious system they had observed from childhood; had they listened to the plain and emphatic statements which their Master had made again and again, "How he must needs go up to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests, and be put to death, and on the third day be raised up,"—then that event, which had filled their minds with grief and alarm, would have proved the confirmation of their faith, and the theme of their rejoicing. For what is the death of Jesus Christ, which these two disciples are mourning? It is the central and most blessed truth in the scheme of divine revelation. It is the consummation of the eternal decrees of grace and mercy. It is the death of sin, the foundation of hope, the fountain of happiness. It is the ransom of our immortal souls, and the subject of endless praise in heaven. Ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands of ransomed saints and holy angels, say, and sing with a loud voice, "Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Do these strains awaken any echo, even the faintest, in my soul?

What is the death of Jesus Christ to me? What are the communications that proceed out of my mouth with regard to it? What is the influence it exerts upon my daily life? Reader, is the death of Jesus the same thing to you that it was to these two disciples? an enigma? a tragedy? a martyrdom? a crime? Are you like these men earnestly and honestly trying to find out the truth with regard to this greatest of all matters? If so, take encouragement from what is here said. They had been very neglectful of the privileges they had enjoyed. Yet

the merciful Jesus sees and sympathises with them in their difficulties and distresses. Although he has now entered into His glory, His heart has lost none of its tenderness and compassion,—He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Can you believe that He who drew near to these men as they walked and were sad—who dispelled the gloom that brooded over their spirits, and turned their sorrow into joy—will leave you in despair?

Brotherly fellowship is expressly enjoined in the Word of God. It is recommended and enforced by the example of our Lord. It has been cultivated by the people of God in every age. In times of trial and persecution, the saints met together for this purpose in dens and caves, on mountains and moors, and at the risk of their lives. To open our hearts to one another with regard to the things of God, is fraught with manifold comforts, it promotes Christian love, it quickens all the graces of the soul; above all, it secures the presence and blessing of Christ.

They talked of Jesus as they went;
  And Jesus, all unknown,
Did at their side Himself present,
  With sweetness all his own.
Swift as he op'd the sacred word,
  His glory they discern'd:
And swift, as His dear voice they heard,
  Their hearts within them burn'd.

He would have left them but that they
  With prayers His love assail'd:
"Depart not yet! a little stay!"
  They pressed him and prevail'd.

And Jesus was revealed as there
  He bless'd and brake the bread:
But, while they mark'd His heavenly air,
  The matchless Guest had fled.

And thus at times, as Christians talk
  Of Jesus and His word,
He joins two friends amidst their walk,
  And makes, unseen, a third.
And oh! how sweet their converse flows,
  Their holy theme how clear.
How warm with love each bosom glows,
  If Jesus is but near!

And they that woo His visits sweet,
  And will not let Him go,
Oft while His broken bread they eat,
  His soul-felt presence know:
His gathered friends he loves to meet.
  And fill with joy their faith,
When they with meeting hearts repeat
  The memory of His death.

But such sweet visits here are brief;
  Dispens'd from stage to stage,
(A cheering and a prized relief,)
  Of faith's hard pilgrimage.
There is a scene where Jesus ne'er,
  Ne'er leaves His happy guests;
He spreads a ceaseless banquet there,
  And love still fires their breasts.

THOMAS GRINFIELD.

Eighteenth.

WHOM SEEK YE.

JOHN xviii. 4.—Whom seek ye?

JESUS is in the garden of Gethsemane. The awful agony has just come to an end. The great sufferer enjoys a breathing time. It lasts, however, only for a moment; for the bargain with Judas has been struck; the foul plot of the chief priests and scribes is being carried out; the Roman soldiers have girt on their swords; the Jewish servants have grasped their staves; "the great multitude" (why were there so many of them?) have sallied forth from Jerusalem on their midnight march. They cross the Kedron, and draw near to the spot hallowed by the agonies, the tears, and the blood-drops of the Son of God. Jesus heard the sound of their approaching steps. He saw their forms and the gleaming of their lights. Well did He know who they were, why and whence they came. And how did He act? Did He with a thunderbolt of vengeance smite down to the lowest hell that basest of traitors, and those daring men who have come out against Him? Or did He now, as in times past, seek to escape out of the hands of His enemies? Does the second Adam, like the first, hide Himself among the trees of the garden? Or, knowing that the last dread hour had come, does His

heart tremble and His cheek grow pale? Does He shudder and shrink back in view of the awful ordeal? It was far otherwise. He foresees, in fullest detail, all the things that were coming upon Him. His tender and sensitive nature feels pain and outrage in a way our hardened hearts cannot understand; yet He is quite calm and undaunted. To Him the bitterness of death was, in great measure, past. An host encamps against Him, yet His heart does not fear. Stepping forth from beneath the olive trees, He courageously advances to meet the great multitude. Standing in front of them, with quiet majesty He puts the question, "*Whom seek ye?*" In that crowd there were many Jews who must have known at once who the questioner was; yet none of them venture to answer, We seek Thee. They leave it to the sturdy Roman soldier to give the reply, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answers, "I am He." As soon as the words have fallen from His lips, as if smitten by an unseen hand, they were filled with sudden panic and terror: the joints of their loins were loosed; their knees smote one against another; and in a moment they all "went backward, and fell to the ground." What a strange sight! What a striking proof of the almighty power of Jesus! One glance of His eye, one word from His lips, and all their strength and courage are gone, and they are lying low in the dust before Him. But the sudden feeling of terror speedily passes away. They are soon on their feet again. "Then asked He them a second time, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he; if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way; that the saying might be fulfilled which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none."

"Let these, my disciples, go their way." How wonderful that He should think of others at such a time as this! Put yourself, if you can, in the midst of the scene in which He was then placed. He is already in the hands of the men who are to lead Him to the Judgment Hall and to Calvary. The sorrows of death compassed Him about, the pains of hell gat hold on Him. At that awful hour, might we not have thought that His mind would have been wholly engrossed with the things that concerned Himself. Such is the manner of men, but such was not the manner of Jesus: thrice blessed be His name! Even then His thoughts were towards His little flock. The first thing He does is to spread over them the shield of His tender care. "Let these go their way." He is far more concerned about their safety than His own. Seize Me; but let them alone. Bind Me; but let them go free. Slay Me; but let them be safe. Let Thine hand, I pray Thee, O Lord God, be on Me; but not on My people. Such is the language and meaning both of the Saviour's life and death.

This twice repeated question, "Whom seek ye?" was perhaps meant to be a last appeal to the conscience of those to whom it was put. Is this the return you make for all My manifold works of mercy and words of love? Are ye come out as against a thief, with swords and staves for to take Me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on Me: of what crime have I been guilty, that ye seek to put Me to death? Would you imbrue your hands in innocent blood? Take heed, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

This question makes known the Saviour's willingness

—unwavering to the last—to undergo the sorrows and sufferings of death, for the sake of guilty men. Scripture teaches that, from first to last, every step that He took, and everything that He did; every word that He uttered, and every pang that He endured in our behalf, were perfectly voluntary. Of all the sighs that rose from His heart, of all the tears that fell from His eyes, there was not one of regret because He had undertaken to be the brother and the Saviour of men. Hence, we read He was led—not driven or dragged—as a lamb to the slaughter. The Lord God hath opened mine ears, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheek to them that plucked off the hair. He hid not His face from shame and spitting.

Though He knew, as we have seen, that they were coming to take Him, He did not seek to escape. He did not wait until he was seized. He went forth to meet His enemies, and delivered Himself up into their hands. When they came to take Him by force, and make Him a king, He fled from them; but He did not flee when they came to put Him to death. Though He refused a crown, He did not refuse the Cross. No one can say He yielded Himself up because He saw it was hopeless to try to get out of their hands. What meant that smiting down to the ground? Had He not been willing to be made a prisoner, where is the stronger than He by whom He could have been bound? Of what avail would have been all their swords and staves, lanterns and torches? All the armies of Rome, all the hosts of earth, all the legions of hell, could not have laid hold on Him contrary to His will. Had He not been willing to suffer and to die, it would have been both cruel and

unjust on the part of Jehovah to wound Him, and bruise Him, and put Him to grief. Had He not been willing to die, His death could not have been an atonement; for how can suffering in itself appease God? Had He not been willing to die, He never could have died; for He was God, and who can constrain the will of Him that is Divine? But to say He was willing to lay down His life, is to come far short of the statements that fell from His own lips on this subject. It is evident that His heart was beating and bounding with desire to fulfil His course. "I delight to do thy will, O God. The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. Properly speaking, His life was not taken away; it was "*laid down*," as a free-will offering on the altar of love. He died, not because He could not, but because He would not, escape from it. Death did not conquer Him; He conquered death. He gave up the Ghost; not in the weakness and exhaustion of nature, but with a loud voice, with the shout of a conqueror. Blessed be God, the work of redemption, from beginning to end, as a whole, and in all its parts, was heartily and joyously performed. This is its highest excellence, its greatest beauty, its crowning glory. To this it owes all its claims to our gratitude and our love. Let the generous alacrity of Jesus beget in me like alacrity. As He did all and suffered all so gladly and willingly, let me serve Him and suffer for Him with all willingness of heart and readiness of mind.

Nineteenth.

WHENCE WAS THE BAPTISM OF JOHN?

MATT. xxi. 25.—The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?

IT is the third day of the week on which our Lord was put to death. The great crisis of His earthly history is at hand. The hosts of darkness are mustering to battle. The last and fatal conflict is already begun. The first of a series of attacks was made by the Sanhedrim, the highest ecclesiastical tribunal of the country.

As Jesus taught the people in the temple and preached the Gospel, there came to Him, in a body, the chief-priests, and the scribes, and the elders. They suddenly and rudely interrupted His discourse with the peremptory demand, "By what authority doest thou these things, and who gave thee this authority?" Considered in itself their question is not only faultless, but praiseworthy. What more reasonable on the part of private individuals, what more competent and proper on the part of public authorities, than to ask, what was the warrant on which this new Teacher acted, and what the grounds on which He rested His extraordinary claims? And had they approached our Lord as humble and honest lovers of truth, doubtless they would have received a hearty welcome, and a satisfactory answer. But what was the purpose of their coming? It was that they might find occasion against Him. "They sought to destroy Him." They have deliberately re-

solved to put Him to death. Accordingly they ask this question, not because they had any desire to arrive at the truth with respect to Jesus; but in the hope that His answer might furnish them with a pretext for carrying into execution their infamous design. Moreover, by this public and formal demand, they wished to proclaim to all the people, who were so willing to listen to Him and to follow Him, that Jesus took too much upon Himself, and that He had obtained no authority to teach, either from the rulers of the Jewish church, or from God. They wished it to be understood, that Jesus was an impostor and usurper.

But yesterday Jesus made a public and triumphant entry into Jerusalem. He received a royal welcome from the people. A very great multitude went forth to meet Him. They spread their garments and branches in the way, as the custom was when welcome was given and honour done to a king. Jesus received their loud hosannahs—"Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!" Nay, more, when He reached Jerusalem, the first thing He did was to repair to the temple and exercise kingly authority. He cast out all them that bought and sold, and overturned the tables of the money-changers. These things filled the minds of the scribes and chief-priests with malice to such an extent that they sought how they might put Him to death. Hence it was with the basest motives that they came to Him and asked, "by what authority doest thou these things, and who gave thee this authority? Jesus answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?" Answer me,

was the ministry of the Baptist of divine or human authority? Was John a true prophet or ambassador of heaven? Tell me if you can, if you dare.

These words present a beautiful example of the meekness, firmness, and wisdom of Jesus. When we consider the insolent and offensive way in which they approached Him, and the cruel and malicious motives by which they were actuated, are we not constrained to wonder that He did not decline to answer them, and that He did not drive them forth (as He could easily have done) from His presence. Instead of this, He puts a counter-question, which was well fitted both to awaken the conscience of these infatuated men, and to make manifest to all the people, what was their true character. Suppose that the chief-priests, scribes, and elders deny that John Baptist was a divinely-appointed teacher, then they place themselves in antagonism to the great body of their fellow-countrymen, who held that he was a prophet sent of God. Or suppose that the rulers affirm that John Baptist was what he professed to be, then they are bound to recognize the claim of Jesus, for John declared that he was the forerunner of the Messiah. He bare record, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him." He testified, "God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him." "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." John Baptist was the last and the greatest of the prophets. He was the morning star that ushered in the Sun of righteousness. He raised his finger and directed the multitudes that crowded around him, to Jesus.

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." The Sanhedrim could not be ignorant of these things, for they had sent a deputation to John Baptist, at the time when they were spoken. If they recognized the character and claims of this man as a Heaven-sent messenger, and they dare not call them in question, why then had they dealt with him as they had done? Why did they not believe his declarations? Or, once more, suppose they allege, as they actually did, that they could not tell whether John Baptist was or was not a true prophet, what was this but a confession, made before all the people assembled in the temple, that they were blind guides, utterly incompetent to discharge the duties of the office which they held, and therefore quite unworthy of the confidence of the Jewish Church and nation. Such a statement was nothing else than a public declaration of their own sin and shame.

Thus in the exercise of that wisdom which no human device could baffle, the wise are taken in their own craftiness, and their insincerity and iniquity most successfully exposed. These men doubtless expected to hear a reply to their question, which would furnish them with occasion to raise the cry of blasphemy against our Lord. How different was the result! They were not only miserably disappointed in the object they had in view; but the base hypocrites are unmasked. They stand convicted of evasion and insincerity.

What is the best method of dealing with the enemies of religion, whether they are open and avowed opponents, or merely cavillers and formalists that desire to ward off from themselves all personal convictions? In this matter, as in every other, let us observe the ex-

ample of our Lord Jesus Christ. Mark the courtesy, forbearance, wisdom, and firmness which He displayed on this occasion. Let us be wise as serpents, as well as harmless as doves. He met them in their own way. He fought against them with their own weapons. He gave question for question. He contended not for victory, but for truth. His great aim, as we shall afterwards see more distinctly, was neither to put them to silence, nor to cover them with shame and confusion of face; but to carry conviction to their hardened and guilty conscience, and to bring them to the saving knowledge of the truth. Let us never lose sight of the same great objects, as often as we come into collision with the enemies of our holy faith.

Jesus continues to put and to press the question. Whence was the baptism of John? If we say from heaven, He asks, Have you considered its meaning and lessons? Have you repented of all your sins, and laid them on the Lamb of God?

"O for that tenderness of heart,
Which bows before the Lord,
Acknowledging how just thou art,
And trembling at thy word.

"O for those humble contrite tears,
Which from repentance flow;
That consciousness of guilt which fears
The long-suspended blow!

"Saviour, to me in pity give
The sensible distress;
The pledge thou wilt at last receive,
And bid me die in peace."

CHARLES WESLEY.

Twentieth.

WHO DOES THE FATHER'S WILL?

MATT. xxi. 28-31.—What think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterwards he repented and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father?

THIS parable follows up the train of thoughts suggested by the foregoing question. The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders have answered that they cannot tell whether the mission of John Baptist was from heaven or of men. This statement was a falsehood. They did know that John was a divinely commissioned teacher; but they shrank from avowing that which their conscience declared was the truth. And why? Because they were acting contrary to their convictions, and because, if questioned still further, as they expected to be, they could not give any proper reason why they had not believed the declarations of John regarding Jesus. Therefore they had recourse to a miserable evasion. "We cannot tell." The faithful Witness cannot allow such conduct to escape without fullest exposure and sternest rebuke. They have refused to give an honest answer to a plain question; therefore He changes His mode of deaiing, speaks to them in parables, and leads them in this way to pronounce sentence of condemnation upon themselves. They might profess ignorance with regard to the ministry of John Baptist. But it is impossible to allege, they do not know which of the two sons mentioned in this

parable obeyed the will of his father. Here, at least, is no room for doubt. What can be clearer, than that deeds are better than words, that it is better to promise nothing and perform much, than to promise much and perform nothing? No master, no father in the world, will reckon him obedient who says he will obey and does not obey, or him disobedient who, at the last, if not at the first, does what he is commanded. To hesitate here is utterly impossible. Therefore the chief priests, scribes, and elders are forced to give an answer, which sets above themselves the publicans and harlots upon whom they were wont to look down with contempt.

The meaning of the parable is very plain. "The certain man" is God. He is most willing to be to all of us that which the most loving father is to his child. He is our Father in Heaven. He longs with all His heart to embrace us as His sons and daughters. "The two sons," of course, are the publicans and harlots, who represent the "first;" and the chief priests, elders, and scribes who represent the "second." To the one and to the other God speaks as to dear children. To both He issues the same command, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard."

How many motives to exertion are suggested by these very beautiful words, "*Son*," my dear child, I am, I have been to thee a kind father, therefore it becomes thee most willingly to obey me, most cheerfully to serve me. "*Go work*," why stand idle all day long in the world's market? thou art created for work;—work somehow thou must—God has very much work for thee to do. "*In my vineyard.*" It is not, go into the fields to feed swine; it is not low, degrading, slavish drudgery to which thou art called; it is service in the Church of God, un-

dertaken for souls, for eternity, for Jesus Christ, work of the noblest, highest, most honourable kind. "*To-day.*" How short is the period of service. It is but a day, and then come everlasting rest and reward. Work to-day in God's vineyard, and throughout eternity thou shalt eat the fruits thereof, for they are thine as well as mine. "All that I have is thine." Thou art my son, and therefore mine heir.

Thus God speaks to each of us, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." Labour on earth and rest in heaven. Work while it is called to-day; the night of darkness cometh when no man can see to work. He condemns a life of mere inaction, of speculation, or of selfish enjoyment. On the mount of Transfiguration, Simon Peter sought to build three tabernacles and to remain there for ever. But the master would not listen to the proposal. Behold the once furious maniac whose name was Legion, whose home was the mountain or the tomb, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. What a change! He knew and felt it in his soul. His heart is overflowing with gratitude. To Jesus he ascribes all the praise. He desires to be with Jesus for ever. He would follow Him to the end of the world. He would listen for ever to these wonderful words of which he has heard so little. But it must not be—such is not the master's will. To him also the same command is given, although in other words. "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee."

Observe the striking contrast which the conduct of the two sons presents. He came to the first, and said, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not." The command breathes the spirit

of conciliation; the response is rude. He does not call Him Father or Lord. He does not say, "I pray thee, have me excused," nor take the trouble to frame apologies for delay; nor does he plead the lack of opportunity, or the pressure of business, the difficulty of the task, or his inability to perform it; nor has he recourse to paltry evasions. He honestly declares the truth, "I will not." Hypocrisy is not one of his sins. The first son represents the openly ungodly and profane of every age—the publicans and harlots of our Lord's time. Notwithstanding their high-handed rebellion, their gross and unblushing wickedness, even to such Jesus Christ in infinite mercy offers free pardon and perfect peace. He commands and entreats them to be reconciled to God. He assures them again and again, that it is a faithful saying, worthy of their acceptation, that He came into the world to save sinners, even the very chief. He tells them that they are fully warranted to accept Him as their Saviour, and that they are as welcome as they are unworthy. He implores them to come unto Him just as they are. He protests unto them that no recommendation or qualification is required except that they are wretched and miserable, guilty and lost. Blessed be God, though at first they refuse and rebel, yet oftentimes second and better thoughts arise in the hearts even of the most abandoned and daring sinners.

Look at the conduct of the second son. He receives the same gracious command; and what is the answer, "*I go, sir.*" However it may be with others, I am most ready to do thy will. Command what thou wilt, Lord, I will obey. Here is no lack of warm professions and fair promises. But this was all, "He went not." The main thing was entirely awanting. Thus it was with the

Pharisee, he professed everything—he did nothing. He honoured God with his mouth, but his heart was far from Him. There were a sanctimonious countenance and appearance, a most thorough acquaintance with the letter of Scripture, a punctilious observance of devout forms and solemnities, rites and ceremonies, and manifold traditions; but withal the heart and life were entirely destitute of true piety. "Whether of them twain did the will of his father?" was it the man of deeds or the man of words, the penitent publican or the proud Pharisee?

Why make a religious profession and lead an ungodly life? As if words were as good as deeds; as if that, which will not satisfy any master or father in this world, will satisfy the most High God. Why do we say, Lord, Lord, if we do not believe in our hearts that so He is? Why call Jehovah the most Holy, and live as if He were the patron of sin? God forbid that we should be guilty of such dreadful wickedness? Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

O teach me at thy feet to fall,
And yield thee up myself, my all!
Before thy saints my debts to own,
And live and die to thee alone!

Thy Spirit, Lord, at large impart,
Expand and raise and fill my heart?
So may I hope my life shall be
Some faint return, O Lord, to thee.

H. F. Lyte.

Twenty-first.

WHAT SHALL THE LORD DO?

MATT. xxi. 33.—There was a certain householder which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: and when the time of the fruit drew near he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first; and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, he will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

THE householder is God, the vineyard of choicest and noblest plants is the Church. The husbandmen are the Jews, especially their rulers. The hedge which encloses and protects on every side is the special providence of God, which is as a wall of fire round about His people. The wine-press and watch-house are all those institutions appointed for protection and defence, for the administration of justice, for the communication of instruction, and for the worship and service of God. The servants sent at the proper time, in the name of the owner, to gather the fruits, and who were so cruelly and shamefully handled, are the messengers of God, the

prophets, who came to receive the fruits of faith, righteousness, and holy obedience; such as Isaiah, who was sawn asunder, Jeremiah, who was stoned to death, Amos, who was murdered with a club, Zachariah, who was slain between the temple and the altar, and John the Baptist who was beheaded. The patience of the householder represents the infinite forbearance of God towards the Jews, notwithstanding their great and long-continued provocations. Instead of dealing with them as they deserved, and proceeding to extremities, He left no means untried to bring them to repentance. Again and again He sent His prophets unto them. The "*Son*," sent when all other means had failed, and all other messengers had been rejected, is the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten and well-beloved of the Father. He was as much greater than all previous messengers as the heavens are higher than the earth. When He came, it was God himself who came and dwelt with these guilty and ungrateful rebels. His errand was not to take vengeance, but to seek and to save. Compared to the mission of Jesus Christ all the means previously tried were as nothing. Greater generosity or condescension it was not possible for God to manifest. And what was the result? Alas, it was all in vain. Nothing could move these hearts of adamant. They despised and rejected God's last, best, and greatest gift. One does not know which is the more astonishing, their ingratitude or their folly.

God chose the Israelites from among all the nations of the earth to be His peculiar people. He conferred upon them every advantage. He placed them in circumstances the best fitted to check evil and to promote good. He deterred them from sin by the infliction of

dreadful judgments. He gave them a form of worship of unequalled splendour, committed to them His holy oracles, taught them by immediate and direct inspiration from heaven, and sent to them messengers endowed with every variety of gift and grace. He was their pillar of cloud by day, and their pillar of fire by night, and the glory in the midst of them. What could He have done more for His vineyard, than He had done? And what was the return? It was the worst possible. Instead of rendering the fruits of righteousness to the praise and glory of God, there was no sin of which the Israelites were not guilty. They scorned the tokens of divine love and forbearance. They wasted the heritage of God. They quenched the Holy Spirit. Notwithstanding solemn and oft repeated warnings, they are now hastening to embrue their hands in the blood of the Son of God.

"And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge I pray thee between me and my vineyard." "When the Lord, therefore, of the vineyard cometh, what will He do unto these husbandmen?" What do they deserve? Having spoken the parables, having stated the facts, He leaves it with themselves to come to a decision. He appeals with confidence to their own sense of justice. Nor does He appeal in vain. They pronounce their own righteous doom, with their own lips, although they know it not. But He cannot leave them in doubt with regard to the meaning of their decision. "Therefore say I unto you, The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

Observe the connection between the question we are considering, and the two immediately foregoing. It is

very interesting and suggestive. In answer to the question with regard to the authority of John Baptist, our Lord compels the chief priests, scribes, and elders to proclaim their incompetence and insincerity. In answer to the question regarding the two unlike sons, He forces them to declare, that they were worse than publicans and harlots. It required no ordinary skill to obtain these admissions. But the infinitely wise Jesus accomplishes a greater achievement still; in answer to the third question before us, He leads them not only to acknowledge their guilt, as we have seen, but also, the justice of the punishment they were about to endure. He will be justified when He speaketh and clear when He judgeth.

But this question was doubtless designed to serve another purpose. As the midnight lightning-flash shows the benighted traveller the dreadful precipice on the brink of which he is standing, and the awful abyss into which he will fall if he advances one step further in the direction in which he has been moving. So this solemn utterance was intended to reveal to the rulers of the Jews, the dreadful retribution that would come upon them if they carried out the purpose they had recently devised, to put our Lord to death. It is the act of a friend, not of an enemy, to point out approaching danger. They could not have received a more merciful warning. It would have averted impending woe. O that sinners could understand why it is that Jesus Christ speaks more frequently and fully of wrath and hell, than any other divinely appointed teacher. It is, because, of all others, He has the clearest perception of the greatness of the danger arising from sin. It is, because, of all others, He is incomparably the most desirous to prevent

the destruction and to secure the salvation of perishing men.

Where God grants the means of grace, He expects the fruits of faith; as well the inward fruits of the Spirit, as the outward fruits of obedience. The owner of the vineyard "looked for grapes," nothing else will satisfy Him. "He sent His servants to receive the fruits." Although they obtained nothing and worse than nothing, the demand continues to be made. The just claim is never abandoned. And when it becomes clear that the husbandmen will make no return, they are rejected, and the vineyard is given to others, "who shall render Him the fruits in their seasons." Men expect returns bearing some proportion to the toil and cost laid out on their fields of exertion. In like manner, God, the great husbandman requires and looks for "fruits of holiness," corresponding to the benefits and privileges He has conferred. All the parts of our holy religion, all its truths, all its institutions, all its gracious and supernatural communications have a practical tendency and aim. Their grand primary design is not to deliver us from evils, or to impart to us peace, or to promote our gratification; but it is to make us humble, honest, truthful, self-sacrificing and zealous in all kinds of good works.

Twenty-second.

WHY KILL ME?

JOHN vii. 19.—Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?

THE rulers of the Jews have been seeking to put Jesus to death on the alleged grounds that He had been guilty of blasphemy and Sabbath-breaking. They professed to be acting entirely from a regard to the law of Moses. In the words before us Christ calls this in question, and charges them with insincerity and inconsistency. The substance of what He says is this: If you have, indeed, such a deep sense of the sacredness of these commandments that you think every transgression of them should be visited with the penalty of death, how then does it come to pass that you yourselves do not keep them, nay, more, that by your traditions and in your daily practice you make them of none effect? Does not this show that it is not zeal for the law of God, but something else that makes you desirous to take away my life? I appeal to your conscience, what is your real motive? "Why go ye about to kill me?"

This question is one of the deepest interest and importance at all times. It amounts to this, What are the reason and grounds of disbelief? What is the true and proper cause of the rejection of Christ and Christianity? Let us take the case of the Jews in the first place, and

answer these questions in the light of their history. During long ages the nation of Israel had been undergoing a process of preparation for the coming of Messiah. When the fulness of time was come, they most deeply felt the need of a deliverer, and were standing on the tip-toe of expectation. When the Christ actually appeared in the midst of them, He possessed in the highest degree every quality fitted to secure their perfect confidence. Every one of their predictions was in Him fulfilled. He stood before them in all the majesty of unsullied and unequalled excellence. Love was written on his countenance, and manifested in every word of His lips and in every act of His life. He went about continually doing good. Every sufferer found in Him a helper. The example which he set and the precepts which he taught were of the purest and highest order. There was no lack of signs and wonders, of divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost. Jesus, moreover, undertook to deliver them from the greatest of all calamities, even from that which is the root and cause of all others. He promised, and He was fully prepared to make His words good, to confer upon them the best of all blessings. With perfect truth He proclaimed Himself the remedy for every evil and the balm for every wound, the foundation of all hope, and the fountain of all life and joy. And what was the result? How did the rulers and people of the Jews regard God's best and greatest gift? Did the whole nation rush forth as one man to welcome the promised Messiah? Was He everywhere heartily received? It was far otherwise. Jesus Christ enjoyed indeed a short-lived popularity, but how very soon do we read that the rulers go about to kill Him, and that the people went back and walked no

more with Him. And the question we have to answer is, how are we to account for this startling fact? Why did the clearest proofs carry no conviction? the most transparent goodness and honesty produce no confidence? the utmost kindness no gratitude? the highest excellence no admiration? How did it come to pass that the best and noblest man the world ever saw was dealt with as if He had been the basest of evil-doers, the vilest of outcasts? Men are not wont to be slow in listening to schemes likely to improve their condition, for what reason then did the Jews combine to put to death the Person who announced the grandest and most suitable plan ever unfolded to abate their miseries and to advance their happiness? Why do men, groaning under the most galling yoke of bondage, conspire to take away the life of Him who had no aim but to secure their freedom?

It cannot be said with truth that the Jewish nation rejected and crucified Christ because His character and claims were not supported by a sufficient amount of evidence. The proofs which he furnished were clear and ample enough to carry conviction to the minds of some of their number, and if of some, why not of all? Moreover, it were easy to show that the unbelievers of those days as well as those of our own time acted upon the truth of other things which were sustained by less evidence than were Christ and Christianity. Since, then, deficiency of proof does not and cannot account for the rejection and crucifixion of Christ, the only other explanation that can be given of them is that they were the effects of men's depraved hearts. That this was the true and proper cause is not only implied in the words of our question, but it is plainly stated in the terms by

which they are introduced. See verse 17, "If any man will do—wish to do—His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Unbelief is an offence not of the head but of the heart. The great body of the Jewish nation neither desired nor expected a Saviour. It is evident they did not feel the bitterness of sin. They were proud, carnal, covetous, and self-righteous. They had no relish, but the contrary, for the pure, sublime and humbling truths of the gospel. Give them a political deliverer and they are content. And it was when they saw that Christ was not so much a temporal as a spiritual Redeemer and Reformer that they turned against Him and sought to put Him to death. Though they know it not it is for substantially the same reason that many in our own day reject Christ. The chief cause of their so doing is neither insufficient proof, nor intellectual difficulties, but the alienated heart—the depraved will. "We will not have this man to reign over us." "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life." Let it never be forgotten that no amount of outward evidence of itself will produce faith. In what respect were the proofs which our Lord furnished deficient? In none—yet we have seen what was the result.

Or take the case of the ancient Israelites in the wilderness. They saw all the signs and wonders of Egypt and the Red Sea. Daily they ate manna from heaven and drank water miraculously drawn from the flinty rock. They beheld all the great and terrible things at Sinai. They felt the earthquake and heard the sound of the trumpet—yea, the voice of God Himself. Yet all these things were in vain. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from

the living God. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace." Heb. x. 28, 29.

The opening words of this question, "Did not Moses give you the law," remind us of the way in which our master was wont to appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures. Did He read or preach in the synagogue? the Bible was His text-book. Did He contend with Satan? This was the weapon He wielded, "It is written, it is written." Is He asked to turn aside from the path of duty and of suffering? This is His reply, "How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be," Matt. xxvi. 54. Did difficulties and disputes arise with regard to such matters as marriage, Mark x. 3; the Sabbath, Mark ii. 25, 26; the resurrection, Matt. xxii. 32; or His own divinity, Matt. xxii. 43. He appeals for settlement to the Old Testament. He has cited as from God—Genesis, Matt. xix. 4; Exodus, Mark vii. 10; Leviticus, Matt. v. 22-43; Numbers, Matt. v. 33; Deuteronomy, Mark xii. 29; the Book of Samuel, Matt. xii. 3; of Kings, Matt. xii. 42; of Jonah, Matt. xii. 40; and of Daniel, Matt. xxiv. 15. He has cited Isaiah, Matt. xiii. 14; Hosea, Matt. ix. 13; Jeremiah, Matt. xxi. 13, &c. His recognitions of Moses and the Pentateuch are very numerous. "Have ye not read the law of Moses? What did Moses command you? They have Moses and the prophets. Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures." He accepts as true not only the ordinary facts

of history, but also those that are supernatural and miraculous, as for example, the creation of Adam and Eve, Mark x. 9; the deluge, Matt. xxiv. 37; the destruction of Sodom, Luke xvii. 29; the brazen serpent, John iii. 14.

Let us receive the testimony of our Redeemer regarding the authority and integrity of the Old Testament Scriptures. Let us read and reverence the Bible as the complete record of God's will, the infallible standard of truth, the sole judge of controversies, the only rule of faith and manners. "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them," Isa. viii. 20.

Words of eternal life to me,
O may my faith receive the whole!
Bound with my heart strings, let them be
Hid in the secret of my soul.

Though heaven and earth shall pass away,
These words of prophecy are sure;
Unchangeable amidst decay,
And pure as God himself is pure.

Whoe'er to these shall add alloy,
Or take one sacred fragment thence;
Them and their Works will God destroy,
His arm shall be His truth's defence.

Firm in that truth may we abide
Till Christ our Lord appear again;
Come, say the Spirit and the bride,
Lord Jesus quickly come.—Amen.

JAMES MONTGOMERY.

Twenty-third.

SHALL HE NOT GIVE THE SPIRIT?

LUKE xi. 11-13. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?

IN the beginning of this chapter, in compliance with the request of His disciples, Jesus teaches them, and all men, how and for what things to pray. Having composed for our use and our imitation, that form of words, of unequalled excellence, commonly called "the Lord's prayer," He next proceeds to show the great necessity, importance, and certain success of earnest, importunate and persevering supplications.

The words of our question teach us, that the Holy Spirit should ever form the principal matter of our prayers. It is right and necessary to ask other things, but this should always be the chief request, the burden of our cry. Give me thy Holy and Good Spirit. That this should be the case, is manifest from a comparison of our question with the foregoing verses of this chapter. There can be no doubt that our Lord is here laying down a great law of the kingdom of Heaven. He is inculcating the duty of prayer for every age of the world,

and for every class and condition of men. Thrice over He repeats the command, "*Ask*," *Seek*," "*Knock*." Thrice over He reiterates the promise, "ye shall receive," "ye shall find," "it shall be opened." But all the while He does not state what it is that we are so earnestly to desire, and so certainly to obtain. It is something which we cannot seek with too great diligence and confidence. It is a most crying necessity, a gift which we cannot possibly do without, which we as greatly stand in need of, as a perishing traveller or a starving child stands in need of bread. But it is not until He comes to the end of His argument that He states that this great thing is the Holy Spirit.

The wants of man are innumerable. It has been well said, that his greatest want is that he does not know what he wants. So powerful are our corruptions and temptations, so great is our spiritual blindness, that we do not know what things to pray for as we ought. "Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life?" There are many things both temporal and spiritual which, though good in themselves, are not good for us, and with respect to which, therefore, it is our duty to moderate our desires, and to prepare ourselves for a disappointment. What then are we to ask? If we consult the commands and promises of God's word and not our own feelings, we cannot have any difficulty with respect to this matter, at all times, in all seasons, our intensest desires, our most confident expectations, are to be fixed upon God, the Holy Ghost. What we are to desire supremely, is not a blind impulse, or a mysterious inner light, it is not the blessing of God, or divine influence, but it is the direct and immediate in-working and in-dwelling of the Spirit Himself. We are

commanded to seek for Him who is one in essence with the Father and the Son. That He Himself should be prayed for is evident from the fact, that it is He and nothing less that is promised and bestowed. He is the Spirit of Promise. The Holy Spirit dwelleth in you. He that is in you is greater than He that is in the world. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given us. Realize that it is the Blessed Spirit Himself that is offered, and we cannot help feeling that no efforts can be too great or too long continued, that no pursuit can be too eager, no sacrifice too costly, no prayers too earnest to secure a boon of such infinite value. Words cannot express the greatness and excellence of the gift of the Spirit. Compared with God the Holy Spirit, what are all the honours and glories, all the wealth and power of this world?

But the Divine Paraclete is not only an object of unequalled and ineffable magnitude and blessedness. He is also absolutely necessary. Experience and revelation amply prove what is plainly implied in the words, before us, "ye being evil," that the heart of man is depraved and utterly incapable of itself of loving or serving God. The Scriptures moreover clearly testify, that the Holy Spirit is the author of all spiritual life and feeling. The efficacy of all the means of grace, the word, sacraments, and prayer; all ministerial success: the formation and growth of all the graces; the right resistance of every temptation; the proper discharge of every duty; the origin, progress, and consummation of the divine life in the soul; all depend entirely upon this mighty and merciful agent. As Jesus Christ has done all *for us* from first to last. So the Holy Spirit does all *in us* from beginning to end.

Are these things so? And no one can doubt of them

who reads the Scriptures. Should not this Spirit constitute the main subject of all our supplication? Should not His absence from the soul, or from the Church, be lamented as the greatest possible calamity? Should we not habitually pant and long for Him above all other things? Give me thy Spirit or I die. Take from me what Thou wilt, but withhold not, O God of mercy, Thy Good Spirit.

The question before us affords the greatest encouragement to pray for the Holy Spirit. Luther has well said, "although we had no other motive or incentive to prayer, than this kind and precious saying, it were enough of itself." Observe the reasoning of our Lord. His argument is from the less to the greater. It is based upon a contrast between the father on earth and the Father in Heaven. Jesus here makes a most striking and touching appeal to the strongest and tenderest feelings of our nature. How real and powerful is the love which parents cherish for their children! How much will they do and endure for the good of their little ones! How great is the patience they exercise towards them! How manifold are the sacrifices they make for their welfare and happiness! Where is the father worthy the name who does not feel the tenderest interest in those whom God has committed to his care, and who are dependent upon him for support, and all things? Where is the father that is not most willing to grant his children every reasonable request; especially to give the necessaries of life? Where is the father so inhuman and cruel, as to refuse bread to a starving child, and to mock him by offering instead a stone or a serpent? Where is the father that would not regard it as the bitterest trial he could endure, to hear his children cry for bread and to

have none to give? Now whence comes the parental instinct so universally and strongly felt? It is implanted and kept alive in our hearts by our Father in Heaven. Jehovah is the fountain of all the affection and tenderness, of all the pity and compassion, of all the human hearts that ever throbbed. May we not therefore most confidently believe, that He will show infinitely greater love and readiness to help than we do? It may well be asked if the little drop of love conveyed to man's heart by the divine hand, produces such tender and powerful emotions, what may we not expect, when we approach the great source of parental feeling, even to God, the boundless and bottomless ocean of loving kindness and tender mercy. If we degraded mortals are willing to do our very utmost, and to give our very best to our children, how infinitely much more willingly shall the Parent of all Good, give His best and most comprehensive gift of the Holy Spirit to them that ask. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills and from the multitudes of mountains. Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel. Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe. Awake, O north wind, and come, O south, blow upon His garden that the spices thereof may flow forth. Spring up O well. Drop down, ye Heavens from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation; and let righteousness spring up together. Amen.

Twenty-fourth.

KNOWEST THOU NOT THESE THINGS?

JOHN iii. 10.—Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

WHAT are "*these things*" which our Lord here rebukes Nicodemus for not knowing? They are the great and weighty matters relating to the nature and necessity of regeneration to which he had just been bearing the most emphatic testimony. The question put to this master of Israel implies that the doctrine of the new birth was taught in the Old Testament Scriptures. If it had not been so, would our Lord have reproved Nicodemus in these terms for being ignorant of it? This was indeed a thing which any Israelite whatever (not to speak of one deemed qualified as this man was to instruct others in faith and duty) might have known. For was it not one of the chief purposes of the Jewish economy to awaken a sense of the nature and necessity of true holiness? Did it not require of every worshipper "a pure heart as well as clean hands." Ps. xxiv. 36. Was it not ever saying by word and symbol, "*Wash you, make you clean.*" Isa. i. 16. "*Make you a new heart and a new spirit.*" Ezek. xviii. 31. What was the true meaning of circumcision—the distinctive rite of Judaism? Was it not substantially the same as baptism? Neither

is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh, but that which is inward of the heart—in the spirit. Rom. ii. 28, 29. That the spiritual signification of this rite was regeneration we learn from Moses as well as from Paul. "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live." Deut. xxx. 6. See also Jer. iv. 4. As often as the rite of circumcision was performed, it proclaimed the necessity of cutting off from the heart every sinful thought, affection, and desire. Therefore, it was disgraceful and criminal in any Jew, and much more in Nicodemus, not to be acquainted with this truth. Well might our Lord ask, Art thou a master of the Israel of God, and knowest not these things? Art thou a teacher of religion, and not acquaiuted with its alphabet? A guide to heaven! and dost thou not know the only gate by which it can be entered?

But the absolute necessity of a radical change of heart had been announced to Nicodemus, as it has been announced to us, by one infinitely greater than Moses and the prophets. Twice over, with all the solemnity of an oath, had Jesus declared, "Verily, verily I say unto thee, unless a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God," verse 3. "Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," verse 5. Could words be more decisive? It is settled beyond possibility of doubt. Heaven is shut against every unregenerate man. No matter how high his position, how strait his sect, how strict and scrupulous his observance of religious forms, no matter how blameless his outward conduct, or how conscientious he may be in acting ac-

cording to his sense of duty; it is an utter impossibility for any man whatever to enter into the kingdom of God unless an entire change has been wrought on his soul by the Holy Ghost. This is the doctrine of the whole Word of God. It is proved by all that the Scriptures teach us with respect to the nature of man as a fallen creature; with respect to the great aim of the whole scheme of mercy—even restoration to holiness; and with respect to the pure and spiritual constitution of "the church of the first-born which are written in heaven." But why appeal to such arguments as these? Is not the testimony of Jesus enough? Can any reasonable objection be brought against it? Can it be questioned whether He is a competent witness? "Behold," says God, "I have given Him for a witness to the people." Isa. lv. 4. Is it possible to point out any defect in His personal character? Who can convince Him of sin? Can it be doubted whether He is fully acquainted with the things He asserts? "The Father loveth the Son and showeth Him all things." That the doctrine of the new birth is a certain and infallible truth is not only affirmed by all the teachers sent from God, is not only confirmed by the whole life and sealed by the blood of the Son of God, but it is also attested by the Father and the Holy Ghost. "Verily, verily I say unto you we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen. These things saith He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." Such being His sure and solemn testimony, doth it not become me most earnestly to ask, am I or am I not born again? What is it to be so born? Mark what the Scriptures say with regard to *Regeneration.* Observe the

terms by which it is described. It is called, *taking away the stony heart and giving an heart of flesh.* Ezek. xi. 10. Putting off the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new man. Col. iii. 9. It is translation from darkness into marvellous light. 1 Pet. ii. 9. It consists of being made partakers of the Divine nature. 2 Pet. i. 4. It is an awakening, a quickening, a liberation, a resurrection, a transformation, a new creation of the soul. If these words and emblems have any meaning, they describe a radical change of heart—a change, sovereign and supernatural in its origin; and universal, glorious and ever-enduring in its results. This is evidently no mere outward reformation brought to pass by the efforts of man, but a great inward revolution wrought by the renewing of the Holy Ghost. Titus iii. 5. According to the working of His mighty power. Eph. i. 19, 20. This is not a change on the substance or structure, but in the susceptibilities of the soul: it is not the destruction of its essential nature, but the giving to it a new disposition, tendency, or direction.

In what does this change consist? Regeneration is an act of the Almighty power of the Spirit of God, in which He subdues the dominion of sin over the soul, and creates in it a new, divine, gracious and holy principle, which so governs the will and rules the affections that we heartily and habitually desire to love and serve God, and to cleave unto him as our portion and happiness. In other words, it is the restoration of the defaced image of God to the soul. Our Lord tells us that the work of the Spirit in the new birth, like the blowing of the wind, can be known only by the effects produced. The results of regeneration are very plainly stated in the Word of God.

(1.) Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." 1 John v. 1. Every regenerate person builds all his hopes of eternal life, not on any goodness of his own, but only on the righteousness of Christ.

(2.) "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren." 1 John iii. 14. "Every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth Him that is begotten of Him."

(3.) Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." 1 John v. 4. His heart is no longer set upon earthly things, such as power or pleasure, wealth or fame. The world has ceased to be all to the soul. Its false colours have been stripped off. Its charm has been broken. God now reigns supreme in the heart.

(4.) "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin," 1 John iii. 9, "and doeth righteousness." 1 John ii. 29. Though in many things he offend, the strongest thing in him, the ruling power of his soul, is not nature but grace, not the love of sin but the love of righteousness. He honestly and steadily aims and desires to shun all that is evil and to follow all that is good.

(5.) "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." 2 Cor. v. 17. He is in a new world, everything wears a new aspect, he has new views of himself, of sin, of salvation, of the world and of God, new affections, new desires, new aims, new enjoyments, new conflicts, new expectations, and he leads a new life. Let me test myself by these evidences of the new birth. Do I depend upon Christ alone for the salvation of my soul? Am I a lover of good men? Have I forsaken the world? Do I hate and flee from sin as an abominable thing? Does my soul hunger and thirst after righteous-

ness? Am I sailing with the prevailing stream of ungodliness, or are the bent of my mind and the course of my life contrary to sin and toward God? Are these things true of me? Then I am regenerate. I am pardoned and blessed. I am safe now and safe for ever. I have a right to all the privileges of the children of God. Are these things not true of me? Then I am unregenerate. I am not a child of God. I am not a Christian. My religion is a mockery, a building without a foundation, a body without a soul. Not one of my sins is forgiven. I am exposed every moment to the most dreadful danger. There is nothing for me but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.

Holy Spirit, gently come,
Raise us from our fallen state,
Fix Thy everlasting home
In the hearts Thou didst create!
  Gift of God most High!
Visit every troubled breast:
Light and Life and Love supply:
Give our spirits perfect rest!

W. HAMMOND.

Twenty-fifth.

KNOW YE WHAT I HAVE DONE?

JOHN xiii. 12.—He said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

THIS question refers to the washing of the disciples' feet by their Lord and Master. The occasion of this act was a strife among them as to which of them should be accounted greatest. The precise order of events is unknown, but it is probable that this rivalry took place in the holy guest chamber, while they were in the act of taking their places at the Supper table. They contend for the seats of honour, seeking to get as near as possible to the Lord; the degree of nearness determining, as they thought, their rank and position in the great worldly kingdom about to be established. Having reproved this most unseemly contention by words, our Lord next proceeds to rebuke it by deeds. He rose from the table, laid aside His upper garments that would have hindered Him in the work He was about to do, took a towel, girded Himself after the manner of the humblest servant or slave, then He poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.

Behold a miniature representation of the whole work of the Redeemer. He is seated at the table of Jehovah in heaven. He is invested with all the ineffable dignity

and majesty, honour and glory of the Eternal Godhead. Angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim bow down before Him. "*He riseth from supper and laid aside His garments.*" He leaves heaven and all its unutterable bliss, lays aside the robe of glory, and descends to the depths. Though in the form of God, and counting it no robbery to be the equal of God, He assumes our nature, He takes the form of a servant. "*He poureth water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet.*" He stoops to the meanest offices, to discharge the most humiliating and painful duties. He wanders on earth without a home. He endures suffering and shame. He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Yet He goes forward unwearied in the greatness of his way. He is obedient to death, even the death of the cross. All this, and infinitely more than heart can conceive, or words can utter, was done and endured, not in order to accomplish any end or aim of His own, but for the love of us and for our sakes, that He might wash and cleanse our souls from sin in His own blood, and make us kings and priests unto God.

Now the inquiry which the question we are considering raises is, what was the great principle which prompted and moved the Lord Jesus Christ to do all these things? What motive carried Him along from first to last? It was self-sacrifice for the good of others. He was willing to do anything, to dare anything, to endure anything for the miserable children of men. Hence the possessor of all parted with all. The highest became the humblest, and He who was the most blessed and beloved in heaven was slighted, scourged, and crucified on earth.

Having finished the washing and wiping of the dis-

ciples' feet, our Lord put on His upper garment and resumed His place at the head of the table, and then, addressing His disciples, asked, Know ye, understand ye, the meaning and design of what I have now done to you? Perceiving that they were unable to answer the question, He answered for them. Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am. If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done unto you. That our Lord did not intend on this occasion to institute the rite of washing the feet, observed by the Church of Rome and the Moravian Brethren, is evident from the explanation He gave, as well as from the fact that the ceremony referred to was not kept until the fourth century. The disciples have been contending with one another for the pre-eminence. They have been manifesting carnal pride and worldly ambition. In these circumstances it became necessary to teach them, in the most impressive way, that is by a symbolical action, what was the nature of the greatness they ought to seek? The Master does not condemn the pursuit of honour, but He shows in what it consists. He does not rebuke them for seeking the foremost place in the kingdom of heaven, but He points out the only path by which it could be reached.

We are so constituted that we must needs admire and imitate. It is a law of our nature, that we become like to the object which we hold in the highest esteem. Our character is determined by that which we daily behold. It is therefore of infinite importance to ascertain what is worthy of our highest admiration. In what does true greatness consist? What is genuine excellence and

nobility of soul? It is not asked what, in point of fact, secures for a man highest renown. But the question is, what is it that properly entitles him to the pre-eminence. Is it noble birth, immense wealth, or physical vigour? Is it intellectual gifts? Let a man possess these things, and he will be surrounded by a multitude of admirers and flatterers. Yet one may have all of them, and be utterly unworthy of esteem or honour. A man may be high in station, and yet low in habits and contemptible in character. He may be great in strength and yet little of soul. He may be a hero abroad, and yet a coward at home. One may be beautiful in appearance, and yet base and polluted in heart; high in talent, and yet brutal in passions. "He may be a giant in intellect, and yet a babe in morality." Where, then, is true greatness to be found? Let the doctrine, the life and death of Jesus Christ, furnish the answer. Let that symbolical washing of His disciples' feet, which embodies and expresses the ruling principle of His whole character and conduct, give the explanation. Or listen to His words, "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be the least of all and the servant of all." It is by going down that men mount up in the kingdom of God. It is by humility and self-sacrificing devotedness to the glory of God and the good of men that the foremost place in heaven is reached.

Jesus Christ served and suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps. We own Him as our Teacher and Master, we call ourselves His disciples or scholars. We say we are willing to learn of Him. We profess our readiness to obey His every command. All this and more is implied in the word "Christian" and in religious profession. Therefore we are

solemnly bound to make Christ our pattern with regard to this and all other matters. Was the Master humble, meek, lowly, self-denied; and should the servant be proud, selfish, indolent, ambitious? Did the Lord of glory stoop to the humblest offices for the good of others, and should we think it beneath us to speak words of sympathy, to do deeds of kindness, if necessary, to wash the feet of any poor weak suffering brother or sister? How incongruous! how unbecoming if we refuse to do what our Master did all His life long. How beautiful and attractive is the example of Jesus Christ. It is absolutely perfect. In the lives of the holiest Christians, while there is much to admire and imitate, there is always something to shun and deplore. But in Jesus there is neither spot nor blemish, there is not even the slightest taint or shadow of sin. In Him we behold all that is true, and pure, and good, and tender. He is altogether and always lovely. If I would attain to the highest moral excellence, let me study and copy the words and works of the Great Master. Let me ever remember that Jesus Christ alone is appointed of God to be my example in all things. For this end God sent Him to this world; for this purpose He assumed human nature, submitted to poverty, and all kinds of troubles, trials, and temptations, and obeyed, suffered, and died. One design of all these was, that we might have a living and visible pattern of what we ought to be and to do. His example is not only perfect and divinely appointed, but it possesses this grand peculiarity, that all His actions and all His sufferings from first to last were not for His own sake, but entirely for our good. Therefore gratitude should constrain us to imitate Him always and in all things, and with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind.

Twenty-sixth.

WHY PERSECUTEST THOU ME?

ACTS ix. 4.—Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

THE hungry wolf is ready to pounce upon the helpless fold. Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter, draws near to the famed city of Damascus. It is mid-day. The birds of the air and the beasts of the field are enjoying repose. But the Spirit of the unrelenting persecutor knows no rest. He is exceedingly mad against the Christians. But man's heart is in God's hand, and He turns it according to His mighty will. An eastern sun is shining in its fullest strength and glory, but, lo! in a moment it is eclipsed by uncreated light flashing all around. Saul and they that journeyed with him are struck dumb with terror and amazement, and fall prostrate on the earth. The spoiler is spoiled. He who is charged with the commission of the High Priest, to arrest others, is himself arrested. He who came to carry away captive, from their homes, innocent men and helpless women, is now himself a trembling and feeble captive. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Who can contend with the Almighty and prosper? Behold this high-handed rebel struck down to the dust, with the weapons of haughty defiance in his hands. He is brought very low. What has the man of

cruelty and bloodshed now to expect? Is there anything for him but judgment, and fiery indignation, and wrath? He sees a vision. What is it? Is it the angel of the Lord standing in his way with his sword drawn to take vengeance? Saul hears a voice speaking unto him in the Hebrew tongue. What does it say? Does it call down tribulation and anguish upon his guilty head? Does it pronounce against him the awful sentence of everlasting condemnation? This is what the cruel persecutor, the foul blasphemer, had earned. He had no right to look for anything else. But in the midst of deserved wrath our God remembers mercy. He willeth not the death of the sinner, but rather that he should turn and live. He who showed no mercy, finds mercy. It is not the dark and direful Destroyer, but the bright and thrice blessed Saviour of the very chief of sinners that appears to Saul in the way. What he hears is not the thunder-peal of vengeance, but the still small voice of entreating mercy. It is no word of threatening or terror that falls upon his ear, but tones of tenderest compassion and most thrilling expostulation. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" It is hard for thee to kick against the goads.

Every word of this pregnant question is fraught with meaning. Mark its terms. Twice over does the Lord call him by name, "Saul, Saul." Jesus Christ does not draw His bow at a venture. He does not leave it doubtful to whom He speaks. He singles out one man from among his fellows that journey with him. With the greatest possible solemnity and earnestness, He calls to him personally, as to one tottering unconsciously on the brink of a frightful precipice: Saul, it is death to advance a single step further in this mad career.

The good shepherd calls his own sheep by name. How closely and tenderly does He watch over them. How minutely does He mark everything, no matter how small and trifling it may seem, that concerns their welfare. See how He follows with His eye the steps of this heart-broken penitent, as he enters the gate, and passes along the crowded thoroughfare of the city of Damascus. Nothing escapes His knowledge. He can tell the name of the street. He can point out the very house in which Saul takes up his abode.

Observe how the Lord of Glory condescends to expostulate with this man. "Come," says He, "and let us reason together." "Why persecutest thou me?" Whence this furious zeal? Is it according to knowledge? What have those men and women done, that thou shouldest tear them from their homes and cast them into prison? Dost thou feel no secret misgiving or relenting when thou art entering into every house and making havoc? Hast thou forgotten the sublime scene thou didst witness at the death of Stephen? Wast thou not moved when thou didst hear his noble discourse, and especially the touching words of his prayer, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"? Wast thou not affected, when thou didst hear him quietly say, "Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit?" Wast thou not struck with his calm, gentle, and heavenly bearing, and especially with the appearance his countenance presented, which seemed as if it had been the face of an angel? Hast thou not been strangely restless and uneasy ever since that awful hour? Have not the last words of the dying man been wringing in thine ears? Hast thou no secret doubt that instead of doing good and holy service, thou mayest perhaps be fighting against God? What

if, instead of earning the special blessing, thou art bringing down upon thyself the peculiar displeasure of God?

Saul now first learns who it was he had been persecuting. Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou, not them, but me, the Almighty Lord of Heaven and earth? Who can unfold the meaning of this question; the shock it gave to all his previous ideas and convictions; the change it brought about in his creed, his conduct, and his character; and the vast and varied influence it has had on the history of the church and the world? Can we wonder that he was brought down to the utmost verge of despair, and that for three days and three nights, he neither slept, nor ate, nor drank? Yet he was not allowed to sink into black despair. The thick darkness that broods over his spirit is pierced and lit up by occasional gleams of light and hope. For he cannot forget the compassionate words of Jesus, "it is hard for *thee* to kick against the goads." It is hard not for Me, not for these poor Christian men and women whom thou persecutest; but it is hard for thyself. I am distressed for thee, my brother Saul. If thou wilt show no mercy to me and to mine, have mercy at least upon thyself. "Do thyself no harm." Listen to the voice of thy conscience, struggle no more against thy convictions, be not as the stupid, restive ox that kicks against the sharp goads of its master, only thereby injuring itself and increasing its own distress, and which must submit at last. Knowest thou not in all thy strivings against Me, thou thyself art the chief sufferer? The wrong thou dost is mainly done to thine own soul.

When Jesus says "Why persecutest thou me," what a wonderful and affecting proof does He give of His condescension and sympathy with his people! The Lord

of Glory, He who sits on the right hand of the Majesty in the Heavens, so identifies Himself with the humblest and meanest of His followers on earth, that He regards that which is done to them as done to Himself. He has taken His people into the most intimate and endearing union with Himself; they are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. As their great High Priest He has entered into the Holiest, their names are all written on His heart. He has felt all the sorrow, suffering, and temptation of which they have experience, and therefore He enters into all their feelings with the deepest and tenderest sympathy, He is one with them, as they are one with Him. They have all things in common, they have the same joys and sorrows, friends and foes; reject them, you reject Him, receive them, you receive Him, persecute them, you persecute Him. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." My weal or woe for eternity depends upon what I have done or not done unto Him.

Twenty-seventh.

COULD YE NOT WATCH WITH ME ONE HOUR?

MAT. xxvi. 40. And He cometh unto his disciples and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?

IT is "*the hour and power of darkness.*" Accompanied by His disciples, Jesus calmly cometh to Gethsemane. Having entered the garden He taketh Peter, James and John, and separateth them from the rest in order that they might be near Him and watch and sympathize with Him in the time of His agony and bloody sweat. Then He began to be sore amazed and to be very heavy, and saith unto them, my soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with me, and He went a little further from them, about a stone's cast, and kneeled down and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt, and being in an agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. What words can express,—what mind can understand the astonishment, anguish and distress that now filled the Redeemer's soul. The loftiest flight of imagination, here comes short of the reality. Compared with the load of our guilt, that crushed Him to the earth, and

caused the sweat like drops of blood to ooze from every pore, the concentrated griefs of all the children of sorrow are small as the dust. And now behold the Son of man rising from the cold, damp earth, and coming back to His three chosen friends for sympathy. Does He obtain from them the comfort of which He stood so greatly in need? How are the disciples engaged when the heart broken Master returns? Are they watching or weeping? praying or sympathizing! No, they are sleeping; "*He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep.*" Strange and humiliating fact! On that dread occasion, when they were specially chosen and commanded to watch, they slept, not once, but again and again. A second and a third time, Jesus goes away to pray, and on His return—a second and a third time—He finds them asleep. And how does He deal with their cold and heartless neglect? Does He overwhelm them with scorn and contempt? Does He leave them alone to sleep the sleep of death? No! He rouses and rebukes them in these gentle, touching and faithful words, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?"

Observe carefully the terms of this expostulation. Every word of it is fraught with meaning, and speaks at once of the sin of the disciples, and of the sorrow of their Master.

"*What!*" Is it possible? This is the language of surprise and disappointment and, was it not most astonishing and grievous that they should have failed to watch? No doubt, it was the night season, and they were weary and sad, and the great adversary of their souls was putting forth his evil influence to the utmost. But while making full allowance for these things, can we forget that the Master had most solemnly and pointedly warned

them of immediate and most imminent danger. Had He not plainly and frequently told them that His end was near? Had He not expressly enjoined them to watch, and brought them into the garden for this very purpose? Did they not know full well, that He was undergoing the intensest suffering, and therefore in greatest need of fellowship and sympathy. Did they not see Him shuddering and sweating? Did they not hear Him moaning and praying? Did they not listen to these very words, my soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. After hearing this, how strange, how unfeeling to allow themselves to fall asleep.

Let it not be thought that so great was the weakness of their flesh and the power of their Tempter, that they could not help sleeping. The words of our Lord's question, "Could ye not watch?" are ye so entirely unable? imply the contrary. They could, but they would not watch. Satan cannot concuss the human will. He can do nothing without our consent. Therefore it was their grievous fault and not their inevitable misfortune, that they slept. And so it is in every case, men have to answer to God for their indifference and indolence. In spiritual as well as in natural things it is true, where there is a will there is a way.

The duty laid upon them was most difficult, but consider how great was the motive for its discharge. To this our Lord pointed when He asked, could ye not watch *with me?* How touching this appeal! When so called in providence did you think it too much to watch all night long with your nets? If one of yourselves—a chosen companion—a dear friend—a beloved child were sick and sorrowful even unto death, would ye not watch with him? Could you sleep when such an

one was dying? And can you not watch *with me* in this agonizing hour, and when you know that my end is so near? Is it too much to expect this of you? Can you not watch *with me*, your best friend, your loving Saviour? *With me*, to whom you are bound by the strongest and most endearing ties,—*With me*, whose whole life by day and by night, from beginning to end, has been spent in watching and in praying for the salvation of your souls. Do you not know that I am indeed your brother-man, bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh, and that, in this dark hour, I feel even as you yourselves would feel, were you tried as I now am; and therefore that your sympathy is really as needful and as precious to me as my sympathy is needful and precious to you. How then can you sleep? Is this the return you make for all I have done and endured in your behalf?

Consider for how short a time this service is sought! only "*one hour.*" This is all. One hour hence and the season for watching and for sympathy will be past and gone for ever. Never again will you have it in your power, as now, to stand by me and to give me support and solace. How different very soon will be my words, then I will say unto you, "*Sleep on now, take your rest.*" It matters not now, and nothing will remain to you but the humiliating and bitter feelings of sorrow and shame. "By reason of our stupidity and sloth we missed the opportunity of beholding a scene—of enjoying a privilege—of rendering a service to Christ, without a parallel in the history of mankind, and ever since then, these words have been ringing in our ears, "*What, could ye not watch with me one hour.*" How much would the bitterness of this reflection, and the poignancy of

this question be encreased by the recollection that only a very little time before they had made the highest professions and the loudest protestations of devotion to Jesus. One of them—Simon—he to whom this question was specially put had declared, though all shall be offended yet will I never be offended. A third had said, we are able to drink of the cup you drink of and to be baptized with the baptism that you are baptized with. And see how they act on the very first occasion on which they are put to the proof.

But while we condemn the conduct of these apostles, let us beware lest we too commit their sin. Our crime may be the same as theirs though our circumstances are entirely different. To us—to all—Jesus has said, is ever saying, *watch*. There is no duty more expressly enjoined or more fully and frequently enforced by Christ. There is none of greater importance. What the guard is to the train—the pilot to the ship—the sentinel to the citadel—the watchman to the city—vigilance is to the soul. How many reasons there are why we should watch! How wakeful are our enemies, how weak our hearts, how ensnaring the world. Realize how much we have to lose, not earthly power or pelf, but the truth of God; the peace of our conscience, the perfection of our nature, and the possession of eternal glory. Consider the calling of which we partake, the privileges we enjoy, the promises and protestations we have made. Think of that eye fixed upon us every moment—by night and by day—in solitude and in society. How soon and how suddenly may we be summoned to appear before our Judge, to give in our last account. Of that day and hour knoweth no man. Behold I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments.

How is it with us? Are we watching with Jesus? We are alive and awake enough in regard to the things of this world, but what of the things of eternity? What is the state of our spiritual affections, of our love of Christ, of our hatred of sin, of our charity to men, and of our zeal for the glory of God? Are we not drowsy, and like men that dream? Are we or are we not asleep at our posts? Are we or are we not absorbed with the cares of this life? Can we or can we not recall the time when we were buried in profound spiritual slumber, and Christ came to us and laid His gentle hand upon us, and asked us in the same tender and sorrowful tones that fell upon the ears of Peter, James and John, *What! could you not watch with me one hour?*

What but this was the language of the affliction laid upon your body, of the bereavement that desolated your homes? What but the hand and the voice of Jesus created all these strange movements that stirred the Church, and those wild successive panics and commotions, that shook the world to its very foundations? Know ye not that in all these sicknesses and sorrows, pains and perplexities—judgments and mercies, it was the Master Himself that spoke to you and said, sleeping Christian, what meanest thou? Awake! arise! will nothing move you? Will not the miseries of a world lying in wickedness, will not the cries and tears of the torn and bleeding bride of the Lamb—will not the expiring agonies of lost souls as they sink unto endless woe—will not the dread of agonizing and crucifying the Son of God afresh—scare you out of your slumbers, and cause you to cast off the works of darkness, and to put on the armour of light, to watch and pray always?

This is indeed a most difficult duty, implying as it

does the utmost earnestness and constancy of spirit—a readiness to seize every opportunity—employ every means and wait on every ordinance—to discharge every duty, resist every temptation and bear every trial. Who is sufficient for these things?

Do not forget you have the same blessed encouragement which the disciples of old enjoyed. Are you watching with Christ? then assuredly Christ is *with you, with you* come what may—*with you* always, even unto the end. What would you have more? Is He not sufficient? If Christ is with you, God is with you, and if God is with you, who can be against you?

Brethren, the time is short. What is your life? It is even a vapour which appeareth for a little while and then vanisheth away. Still it may be said, you have to watch only one short hour. How quickly will it be gone—watch, therefore, for ye know not at what hour your Lord cometh. Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him and He will bring it to pass. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved. He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil, He shall preserve thy soul. Amen.

Twenty-eighth.

HAVING EYES SEE YE NOT?

MARK viii. 17.—Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among the five thonsand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto Him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragmeuts took ye up? And they said, Seven. And He said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?

OUR Lord here puts to His disciples not fewer than nine sharp and pointed questions, which follow each other in rapid succession like vivid flashes of lightning. What was the occasion which called forth catechising of such severity and continuance?

When our Lord and His disciples came into the parts of Dalmanutha or Magdala, the Pharisees and Sadducees, now for the first time acting in concert, came unto Him and asked, tempting Him, that He should show them a sign from heaven. They allege they are not satisfied with the many and clear proofs already given of His divine commission. They wish to behold some visible prodigy in the sky, such, we suppose, as an eclipse of the sun, or the appearance of some extraordinary comet or constellation. This demand was made deliberately and from a bad motive. Therefore it greatly

grieved our Saviour. We read, "He sighed deeply in spirit," and then in reply, He denounced them as hypocrites, and as an evil and adulterous generation, who could discern the face of the sky, but who could not, because they would not, discern the signs of the times. Moreover, He declared unto them that no sign should be given unto them, except the sign of the prophet Jonah, that is, His own death and resurrection. Having thus spoken, it is recorded, our Lord immediately afterwards "*left them*," and entering into a ship, departed unto the other side of the sea. "*He left them;*" the words are fraught with very sad and awful significance. They mean that He left them to themselves. He gave them up to hopeless unbelief. He shook off the dust of His feet as a testimony against them. He departed from them to return no more until He shall come to judge the world. Accordingly, immediately afterwards, when they were crossing over the lake, He solemnly warned and charged His disciples in these terms, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees, and of the leaven of Herod." Although they knew it not, He spoke of the doctrine of these ungodly sects. The disciples entirely misunderstood the meaning of this warning. Leaven suggested to their minds nothing else than literal bread. They had somehow forgotten to bring "more than one loaf" with them, and they could not help thinking of this oversight, and connecting it with the caution they had just received. Henceforth they are to stand in an entirely new relation to the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians. They are not to receive food from them. They are not to have any intercourse with them. They are to regard them as heathen men and

publicans. Such was the conclusion they came to, although probably they did not express it very fully. They reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have taken no bread." We have no more than one loaf, and what is that among so many? And if we are to have no further dealings with these men, whence are we to find more? What are we to do? These reasonings very plainly and painfully prove how very little real benefit the disciples had yet derived from the matchless teaching and miracles of their Master. Who are these that think they are now taught to regard all outward intercourse with the wicked as unlawful, and to consider even their bread as polluted? These are the same men to whom, not longer ago than yesterday, our Lord had emphatically proclaimed the great law of His kingdom: "There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him; but the things that come out of him, those are they that defile the man," Mark vii. 15. From within, out of the heart, proceed evil thoughts and the like. Who are these that betray anxiety with regard to the scarcity of food? These are the same persons who have followed Jesus for many days, and have never lacked any good thing. These are the same persons who very recently had seen, on one occasion, five thousand men fed by their Master with five loaves; and on another, four thousand fed with seven loaves. These are they who, when these marvellous repasts were over, had gathered with their own hands, and had actually for many days lived upon the fragments that remained. Why, then, do these unbelieving thoughts arise in their hearts, and these sinful reasonings fall from their lips? Surely He who had provided for them in time past would not forsake them in the time to come. Had He under-

gone any change since then? Had His arm become feeble? Was His strength abated? Could not He, who gave bread to the many by a mere word of His mouth, by the same means give bread to the few? Had He fed the mixed multitude, and would He allow His chosen followers to starve!

What a display of ignorance, forgetfulness, and unbelief is here made! Can we wonder that their Master questioned them most severely, and rebuked them most sharply and sternly. "Why reason ye because ye have no bread, after the many proofs you have had of my ability to supply all your wants? Perceive ye not, neither understand, that which has been proclaimed and proved hundreds of times? Have ye your hearts yet hardened? Will nothing move you? Are you lost alike to all spiritual understanding and feeling? Having eyes, do ye not see that which has been presented to your view in the light of noon-day? Having ears, hear ye not the voice of God speaking every day and every hour? Do ye not remember what was done but yesterday, the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves, and of the four thousand with seven loaves? Is it possible that you have already forgotten the number of baskets that were filled with fragments by your own hands? Tell me, how it is that you do not understand the obvious meaning of these things."

Let it not be imagined that the sins and shortcomings so sternly rebuked on this occasion were peculiar to the twelve apostles. They are common to men. "Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt, they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies, but provoked thee at the sea, even the Red Sea." Did manifold and most glorious deliverances cure them of unbe-

lief? On the contrary, no sooner was bread, or water, or flesh awanting than they distrusted God. Did the mighty victories achieved by the strong arm of Jehovah in the times of the Judges or the Kings beget faith in Him as their only King and Protector? The first emergency thereafter found them looking elsewhere for aid. And so it is still, notwithstanding all the superior advantages we enjoy. How often do all of us misunderstand the meaning of our Master's words! How often do we distrust His providence! And why is this? The main reason is, that we are forgetful of the lessons of experience. Like the first disciples, we do not thoughtfully and prayerfully ponder what He has taught us and what He has done for us. Consider the days of old. Remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee. Gather up into the basket of memory all the fragments of the past, carry them along with you, and make use of them day by day as occasion may require.

Twenty-ninth.

CHILDREN, HAVE YE ANY MEAT?

JOHN xxi. 5.—Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No.

OBSERVE the circumstances in which this question was asked. In obedience to their Master's command the Apostles have "gone before Him into Galilee." They have been waiting day after day, it has been supposed, for nearly a month, for the appointed meeting, "upon a certain mountain." But still the Lord delays His coming, and hope deferred makes their hearts sick. It is not unlikely moreover that their stock of money and food had become scanty. What is to be done? Peter proposed that they should betake themselves for a little to their old occupation, namely, "go a-fishing." Forthwith they launched out into the deep, and let down the net. As they did so, could they help recalling the last occasion —more than two years ago—on which they had gone out together, and the strange things that since then had come to pass? Now, as at that time, their labours were in vain, again and again, from sunset to dawn, they cast in the net without success, "that night they caught nothing." Morning was come. It was useless to toil any longer. They made for land. They are tired, hungry, and disheartened. When they were about two hundred cubits from the shore, they saw a stranger stand-

ing on the strand, for the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. He hails them with the question, "Children, have ye any meat?" They answered Him, "No." And He said unto them, cast the net on the right side of the ship and ye shall find. They at once obeyed. They cast, therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. John's eyes "are holden" no longer. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord, The Master is come again.

It soon became evident that it was not for His own sake, but for theirs, that Jesus had asked, "Children have ye any meat?" For, lo! when "they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread." Here is a meal prepared by the Lord's own hand, nor can they doubt whether it has been provided for them, for they receive an invitation from His own lips. "Jesus saith unto them, come and dine." See how their fears were rebuked. How surprised must they have been when they sat down at the table He had furnished for them in the wilderness. What wonders does the presence of the Master work! In a moment the net which has been long empty is filled, plenty takes the place of penury, the hungry are satisfied with good things and the dark night of fruitless toil is followed by a morning bright with joy.

The net drawn safely to land "full of great fishes an hundred fifty and three," not merely supplied the present wants of the apostles, but it was besides an emblem and prediction of the large and definite success of their future labours as fishers of men. The feast on the quiet beach, furnished mainly by the Master's own hand, and enjoyed in His presence, at once strengthened and refreshed the famishing fishermen at the moment, and gave them a

foretaste of the great recompense of reward awaiting them on the peaceful shore of eternity. Though they might not at first see anything symbolic, either in the miracle or in the meal, the disciples must have been greatly moved by the touching proofs thereby afforded of their Master's presence, and power, love, and care. Their old feelings of admiration and thankfulness must have been revived. Their spirits must have thrilled as if the happiest hour of their past intercourse with the Lord had returned.

In putting this question and in preparing this repast, our Lord shewed how tenderly He sympathized with His disciples in their straits, He made it plain, that He had been really though invisibly with them all along and had witnessed all their unsuccessful efforts to obtain food, and that He was concerned when He saw them returning homewards, vexed and weary, hungry and cold. When, as in days gone by, he called them "Children" (the ordinary mode of courteous and friendly address), He did not use words of course, He meant what he said. He intimated by using this word, that though He had now entered upon His state of exaltation, and was soon to ascend to Heaven, the feelings of His heart towards them had undergone no change. It was as if He had said, I am still your brother Jesus—a partaker of your own nature—nothing can either alter or abate my affection for you. I count you members of my body, of my flesh, and of my bones, I am near, ever near, unto you, I know your frame and remember that you are dust. I have felt all the sorrows of life and all the pains of death, therefore I am touched with the feeling of your infirmities, and in all your afflictions I am afflicted. Mine eye rests upon you every moment; marks all your toils and

reverses. Mine ear is ever open to hear your cry. Think not that I will leave you destitute and forlorn, I will provide for all your wants temporal as well as spiritual. There never will be a moment in your history in which you will not find me a very present Help. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee." Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands. Thy walls are continually before me.

We are here taught that there is no limit to the sympathy of Jesus. He enters into all our troubles whether of body, mind, or estate. You can neither name nor think of any sort of trial of which He had not experience. Are you a homeless wanderer? The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. Is your character slandered? What crime is there, that was not laid to His charge? Are you hated and shunned in the world? He was despised and rejected of men. Are you stung by the ingratitude of friends? He was denied by one, betrayed by another, forsaken by all in the day of sorest calamity. The common people who heard Him gladly, cried out crucify Him—Are you accused and buffeted of Satan? Jesus was tempted of the devil. Are you sorely bereaved? Jesus wept. Are you afraid to die? He too felt the shrinkings of nature. "In the days of His flesh He offered up prayers and supplications with strong cryings and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and He was heard in that He feared." Are you walking in darkness and under the hidings of your Father's countenance? He cried out, "my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me? Having suffered

intensely and in every way, and all for your sake, can you doubt whether He feels for you and feels with you in all your straits? Believe it, all ye afflicted children of God. He who is exalted in the highest Heaven, the Son and Equal of Jehovah, not only knows every evil that befals you, not only pities you in all your distresses, but, however strange it may seem, He actually shares your sufferings and makes them His own. That tender-hearted mother who writhes with pain when she witnesses the agonies of her only child, does not enter so fully and tenderly into its feelings as Christ into those of His children. And we are here taught that His are no idle, inactive sensibilities. For Him to sympathize is the same thing as to succour, to feed the hungry, and to cheer the sorrow-stricken.

This question and the accompanying miracle suggest great lessons to the "fishers of men." The sea is the world, the boat the church, the casting of the net the preaching of the gospel. All ministerial success depends upon the presence of Christ. To show them their utter powerlessness, to exercise their faith, patience, and watchfulness, and to make manifest His own sovereignty, He often permits His servants to toil for a long time without achieving any visible result; but it is well to remember that the night of weeping is followed by the morning of joy. The Master may be present and working though we know it not. He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. Not one of His children will be lost. On yonder happy shore both he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.

Thirtieth.

LOVEST THOU ME?

JOHN xxi. 17.—He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?

WHEN was this all important question put? It is a touching proof of the tenderness of Jesus, that it was not until His third appearance to the apostles after His resurrection, that He dealt with Peter on account of his shameful denial. As soon, indeed, as the offence had been committed, the Lord turned and looked upon Peter, and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, before the cock crow this day thou shalt deny me thrice, and Peter went out and wept bitterly. But from that moment of heart-rending grief to this, not one word had been spoken, not one allusion had been made with regard to the painful subject. The green wound was not touched. Time was given for it to heal. Nay, more, soothing balsams were applied to the sore heart. First of all, ministering angels were sent to the sufferer with that most affecting and consoling message, "Go your way, tell His disciples and *Peter*, that He goeth before you into Galilee, there shall you see Him, as He said unto you." Then the risen Redeemer manifested himself to the lowly penitent sooner than to any of the other apostles. One interview after another took place,

One token after another of full forgiveness and unabated love was given. And it was not until the hour of our Lord's departure from this world was nigh at hand, and when, so to speak, the matter could no longer be delayed, that it was formally taken up and finally settled. A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench. He shall bring forth judgment unto truth.

Why was this question put? Did He who knoweth all things suspect the friendship of His follower? And if this could not be, why did He recall the past, why open up the newly closed wound, and cause it to bleed afresh? Peter's sin is evidently forgiven, why is it not also forgotten? Jesus does not afflict willingly. Various things rendered it necessary that the apostle should be thus questioned. By his threefold denial, he had given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, he had given offence to his fellow disciples, and he had done grievous dishonour and wrong to the holy name and cause of Jesus. Such an offence must be branded with the deepest marks of the Master's displeasure. Publicly committed, it must be publicly condemned and publicly confessed. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear."

It was for the good of his soul that Peter should be thus questioned. Notwithstanding solemn and repeated warnings he had been guilty of the most heinous sin: and why? It was because of his over-weening self-confidence. And to what did this feeling owe its origin? It arose from his lack of self-knowledge. Therefore, nothing could be better for him now than to look into his own heart, and to realize the full extent of the evil he had done. It was to lead him so to do, and thus to

beget in him humility and godly fear that the Master said to him, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" That the question produced these salutary effects is manifest from the way in which it was answered. Formerly Simon proudly boasted, "Though all men deny thee, yet will not I." But what says he now? No longer does he make any slighting comparisons or assert any haughty superiority. He simply yet solemnly appeals to the great Searcher of hearts. "Yea, Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." Where can we find a more beautiful and striking proof of the chastening and humbling effects of godly sorrow?

This question was designed not only to humble, but also and chiefly to heal. Suppose it had never been asked, and that our Lord had departed from this world without making any reference at all to the denial, consider how painful would have been the position of the fallen apostle. His sin would have been ever before him. He could never have had true peace of mind. Ever and anon would he have been haunted by the fear, that he was neither forgiven nor warranted to engage again in the work of the Christian ministry. Will the Lord accept service from one who had most basely disowned and deserted Him in the time of sorest calamity? He who came to heal the broken-hearted cannot leave His sorrowing disciple in darkness or doubt. He cannot help entering into explanations with Peter. Therefore three several times He proposed this question, not merely in order to recall the thrice repeated denial, and to receive the thrice repeated public profession of penitence; but also and especially that He might enjoy the threefold opportunity to convey the assurance of personal reconciliation and official restoration. Accord-

ingly, a striking gradation, more easily seen in the original text than in our translation, marks this most beautiful and touching narrative. In the first and second question our Lord employed a term which signifies the highest, purest, yet coldest form of love. In the third question He changed the word and employed instead of it another term which denotes the warmest affection, and which Peter had used in all his three answers. At the end the Master adopted the language of the disciple to intimate that they were now thoroughly at one, and that the last shadow of that dreadful night had passed away for ever. The same thing is seen in our Lord's rejoinders. The first charge committed to Peter was the feeble, the second was the full-grown, the third was the flower of the flock. At the outset he was told merely to give food to lambs; but afterwards he received authority to tend, to do all a shepherd's work, to guard, guide, and fold the flock. The painful words, "*more than these*" occur only in the first question.

Viewed as it ought to be in the light of the circumstances in which it was asked, this question is the most solemn and emphatic assertion that could be uttered in regard to the absolute necessity of love to Christ in order to the successful prosecution of the Christian ministry. None but those that love Jesus can rightly declare His love to perishing sinners. Woe to that man who undertakes the work of God—of souls—and of eternity—without the right heart! To do this, as has been well said, is to become a curse to God's blessed cause, and the author of tenfold destruction to one's own soul.

Christ puts this question, "Lovest thou me?" to each of us, and our destiny for eternity depends on our

answer. He who is to be our judge at the last day expressly declares, that no one who does not love Him more than he loves any other object can be his disciple. Love to Jesus is the essence of religion. Without it, in the nature of things, it is utterly impossible to discharge any one of those duties which the word of God testifies are absolutely necessary to salvation. He, and he only, that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved. But how can we believe or confide in a person for whom we have no affection? Except we repent we must perish. Is it possible to be truly grieved for having offended a being whom we do not love? We are required to deny ourselves, to take up the cross, to cut off the right hand, to pluck out the right eye, to crucify all our sinful desires and affections. Will any one do these hard things for the sake of one whom he lightly esteems? We are commanded to follow the example, to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Can we imitate one whom we do not admire? These duties form the chief parts of piety. Yet none of them can be performed without love to Christ. Get love to Him and you get everything. "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." Refuse to give your heart to Him and you bring down upon yourself all the curses that are written in the Book of God. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha." How unspeakably important, then, is the inquiry, Do I love Jesus Christ? This question admits of a satisfactory answer. Had this not been the case it would never have been asked. The apostle Peter answered it; why may not I do the same? What place does Jesus occupy in my thoughts and affections? "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." Do I delight to

speak of Him? "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Do I honestly and habitually endeavour to rule my life by His Word? "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."

O my soul, does not Jesus deserve thy love? Think who He is. Who can be compared to thy Lord? There is none like Christ, none so glorious, none so good, none so wise, none so kind, none so tender, none so true. Think of the great love wherewith He has loved thee. Realize, above all, that He laid down His life to save thee from everlasting death, and canst thou help loving Him, and praying that thou mayest love Him more and more?

"Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Rev. i. 5, 6.

Now to Him who loved us, gave us
  Every pledge that love could give,
Freely shed His blood to save us,
  Gave His life that we might live;
Be the kingdom and dominion,
  And the glory evermore!

Variation from S. M. WARING.

Thirty-first.

WHERE IS THE GUEST CHAMBER?

MARK xiv. 14.—Where is the guest chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?

OUR Lord's public ministry is now drawing to an end. He has preached His last sermon, He has left the temple of Jerusalem to return no more. "His hour is come." This is the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, when the paschal lamb is selected, slain, carried home by the offerers, prepared and partaken of by each household. Where is Jesus to observe the holy feast? He has no place of abode in Jerusalem. There is no room for the King of glory in all the inns and palaces of His capital city,—of His own chosen Zion. Yesterday all the city was moved at His coming, and went forth to give Him a royal welcome. But now there does not seem to be so much as one ready to receive Him under his roof, or to say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." For the rulers of the Jews have given public notice, "that if any man knew where He was, he should show it, that they might come and take Him." In these circumstances, when the time of the feast drew nigh, the disciples were quite at a loss what to do or where to go. They have no doubt that their Master, as His custom was, will observe the holy sacrament. Surely some suitable place will be found, but

where, they cannot tell. In their difficulty they wisely consult the Master Himself. Let us follow their example in all our straits. They very properly ask, "Where wilt thou that we go and prepare, that thou mayest eat the passover." He has no difficulty in at once pointing out the place, but He does so, not after the manner of men, but in a way peculiar to Himself. Instead of immediately naming the person and the place to be honoured by His presence, "He sent forth two of His disciples"—Peter and John—and saith unto them, "Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water; follow him, and wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, the Master saith, where is the guest chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he will show you a large upper room furnished and prepared; there make ready for us."

Observe the links of this very remarkable chain of events. *First*, at a spot nearly two miles from Bethany, where our Lord now was; *second*, at a precise future moment of time, neither sooner nor later; *third*, the disciples are to meet a man; *fourth*, who is a servant; *fifth*, who bears a vessel; *sixth*, which vessel is a pitcher; *seventh*, which contains water; *eighth*, the servant is to enter a house having a guest chamber unoccupied at a time that Jerusalem is crowded with strangers; *ninth*, that this chamber is of size sufficient to accommodate our Lord and His twelve apostles; and *tenth*, that it belongs to a householder so favourably disposed as to be willing to entertain them at whatever risk.

It is impossible to believe that all these ten things, which were seemingly trifling and accidental, were within the range of mere human sagacity or foresight.

Yet they were all foretold by the Lord. They all took place exactly as He said. How are we to account for this? The only satisfactory solution that can be given is, that there is a particular Providence. Here (and other cases there are without number of a similar sort) is no room for blind chance, or wayward accident, or a mere general superintendence of persons and events. Control is exercised over the most ordinary circumstances of every day life. There is nothing, whether great or little, momentous or minute, that is not guided and governed by the all-wise God. The most trifling incident in the life of the humblest person, not less than the greatest crisis of the mightiest empire, is regulated by the moral Governor of the world. "Are not two sparrows sold for one farthing, and one of them shall not fall to the ground without our Father?" "But the very hairs of our head are all numbered." How consoling to think that Christ is the Providence that exercises this control. Amidst all the trouble and turmoil of this world, the countless changes and dangers of the present, the darkness and uncertainties of the future, what so well fitted as this to sustain the faith and hope of our heart? Trembling disciple, commit thy way unto Him step by step, and in due time He will conduct thee to the guest chamber of sweet and unbroken communion in the Jerusalem above.

The terms of this question will amply repay thoughtful attention. "*The Master saith.*" He claims to be our Lord and Teacher. He alone is our Lawgiver and King. We are bound to believe all that He reveals, to obey all that He commands. "*My time is at hand,*" Matt. xxvi. 18. The last solemn hour did not come upon Him unexpectedly. His death was clearly fore-

seen and oftentimes foretold by Him. It was entirely voluntary. Why did He speak so frequently of His approaching sufferings and death? It was, mercifully to prepare the minds of His disciples for the dreadful catastrophe. He would kindly spare them the shock of a painful surprise. He would tell them of coming perils, that they might gird up the loins of their minds and make ready to meet them aright. Another reason why He referred so frequently to His "*time*," His "*hour*," was because it was nigh at hand and constantly occupied His thoughts. He did not banish the painful subject from His mind. On the contrary, He looked death full in the face. In this as in all things He sets us an example. Let us learn so to number our days as to apply our hearts to heavenly wisdom. "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel."

Observe the dignity and authority in this question. "*The Master saith unto thee*, Where is the guest chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?" He does not solicit hospitality of this householder. He does not ask it as a great favour or honour. He claims the guest chamber as His own by divine right. He speaks in a tone of conscious authority. He knows He has the power to cause His word to be felt and obeyed.

Unlike the potentates of this world, He does not require to introduce His commands with high sounding titles and pompous words. He does not say, I, the Son of God, the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth, the Lord of angels and men, the King of kings, ask, where is the guest chamber. It is simply, "*the Master saith*," and it is enough. Although the question was not put directly by Himself, although it was asked by His disciples in His name, it immediately received a

favourable reply. For where the word of a king is, there is power.

How great the honour, how high the privilege of this householder who entertained the Son of God as his guest. Reader, you may enjoy, not once, but for ever, a nobler distinction, a more enduring happiness. Listen to the words of Jesus, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with me." "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all these things hath mine hand made, and all these things have been, saith the Lord; but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. Thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite one."

Thirty-second.

DOST THOU BELIEVE ON THE SON OF GOD?

JOHN ix. 35.—Dost thou believe on the Son of God?

THIS question is not more momentous in itself, than interesting and instructive in the circumstances which called it forth. It was put to the man born blind, whose eyes Jesus anointed with clay. To test his faith, and to make him a witness to all who saw him on the way, going and returning, our Lord said unto him, Go wash in the pool of Siloam, "He went his way, therefore, and washed and came seeing." This miracle could not fail to make the most decided and favourable impression upon the minds of the people in general. But just in proportion to this it stirred up the envy and hostility of the rulers of the Jews. They took immediate steps to neutralize its effects. They raised their old cry of Sabbath breaking, for it was the Sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. They dealt with the parents of the subject of the miracle. They summoned once and again, the man himself to appear before their tribunal. They tried in every way to poison and prejudice his mind against his great Benefactor. They had recourse by turns, to insinuation, dictation, flattery, and intimidation. But all their artifices failed. The man would not deviate a single hair's breadth from the honest conviction of his own mind. In the presence of the Jewish

Sanhedrim or synagogue court, he not only fearlessly avowed his belief that Jesus was a prophet sent of God, but he did not hesitate to expose, and that too in words of keenest irony, their shallow and contemptible shifts. This was more than the proud self-righteous rulers of the Jews could endure. Are they, sitting on the bench of justice, to be admonished and rebuked by the man standing at their bar? They said with indignation, "Thou wast altogether born in sins and dost thou teach us? and they cast him out." They drove him from their presence. Nor did they think it enough to fling him forth from the judgment hall. They cast him out of their church. They passed on him the dreadful sentence of excommunication. This event was of course everywhere spoken of, and therefore speedily reached the ears of our Lord. Jesus cannot rest until He has blessed him that is persecuted for righteousness sake, and imparted unto him needed confirmation and comfort. The hirelings have cast him out, the Good Shepherd seeks him until He has found him. When father and mother forsake me, the Lord taketh me up.

And how does Jesus deal with the man when He has found him? This is the first question, so far as we know, the only question, that he asks of him. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Thou hast not been afraid to confess thy benefactor before His adversaries, know that He is not ashamed to own and acknowledge thee, even when thou art rejected and excommunicated. Thou hast already declared thy faith, art thou prepared to abide by it, notwithstanding all that it has cost? Thou hast avowed thy belief that I am a divinely commissioned prophet, art thou willing to go further still, and to receive me as the promised Messiah?—As the Son of God?—

As the Saviour of the soul? The primary intention of this question, undoubtedly, was to lead on him to whom it was put, to higher attainments of faith and of knowledge. This man faithfully acted on the light he had, and he speedily receives more. Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance. The builders of the earthly house rejected, as worthless and vile, this stone; behold how the great architect of the temple of God takes it up and polishes it after the similitude of a palace.

This inquiry, moreover, was designed, to teach all the world that there is no way of entering into the Kingdom of God, except by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. In the word of God there is nothing so frequently and so solemnly declared, as the necessity and importance of faith, or believing. This is the hinge on which life and death, salvation, and misery, turn. This is the first and highest, the most immediate and urgent duty. Until this is done, nothing is done. This is called by way of eminence, "the commandment, that we should believe on the name of the only begotten Son." This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." The holy oracles of God, always speak of unbelief as a soul-destroying sin. "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God." He that believeth not, "shall die in his sins,"—"shall not see life,"—"shall not enter into the rest of God." "He that believeth not God, hath made Him a liar, because he believeth not the record God gave of His son." "He that believeth not shall be damned." On the other hand, the scriptures give it as the grand distinction of the true people of God, that they are "Believers." They convey

these blessed assurances that he that believeth shall "never perish,"—"is not condemned,"—"shall never thirst,"—"shall never die,"—"hath the witness in himself." "Sirs, what shall I do to be saved? They said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." No reader of the word of God can doubt that faith or believing is the only means of obtaining deliverance from all evils, and the enjoyment of all good things. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Believing is the root of heavenly affections, the mainspring of Christian effort and of holy living. Without it religious exercises are profitless services, empty ceremonies and servile drudgeries. It is by believing, that our souls live, and move, and have their spiritual being; are justified and sanctified; and overcome sin, the world, Satan and death.

Such being the statements of the God of truth regarding this matter, no inquiry deserves graver or more serious consideration than this;—do I or do I not believe on the name of the only begotten Son of God? The answer to this question determines whether I am a child of God or a child of wrath; whether I am on the way to Heaven or on the way to Hell. Let me examine myself, therefore, whether I am in the faith. What is meant by believing on the Son of God? It is to accept, embrace and receive Jesus Christ, as my own Saviour. It is to take God at His word, to give full credit to His testimony concerning His son, and "the life that is in Him for men." It is to look away from myself, and from all others, to abandon all reliance upon my own, or any other merely human righteousness, and to trust in Jesus alone for the salvation of my soul. It is to build, to found, to rest all my hopes of pardon, of sin,

and acceptance in the sight of the holy God, upon what the Christ has done and endured in the room and stead of guilty men. To believe on the Son of God is not merely to assent to a number of doctrinal statements with respect to Him, it is not a general persuasion of the truth recorded of Him in the scriptures; but it is a distinct, deliberate, personal closing with the Saviour Himself. It is appropriating Him, making Him my own in all His benefits and in all His offices, as He is set before me in the gospel. The question which is here proposed to me by the great Searcher of hearts, to whom I must very soon give an account of myself, is not, do I believe on Him after a sort? "The devils believe and tremble." There is a dead faith. The question is whether my faith is real and heart-felt. Do I lay hold on Jesus as the drowning man grasps the rope thrown to him? Do I look unto him as the dying Israelite gazed upon the serpent of brass? How shall I find out whether I do thus believe? The tree is known by its fruits. Living faith is inseparably connected with the repentance of all sins, and with a willing cheerful obedience of the law of God. Why should I hesitate to put my trust in Jesus Christ? Is He not in every respect trustworthy? Does he not possess in the highest degree every qualification fitted to secure my confidence? Lord Jesus, I believe, help thou mine unbelief. Amen.

Rest, weary soul!
The penalty is borne, the ransom paid,
For all thy sins full satisfaction made;
Strive not to do thyself what Christ has done:
Claim the free gift, and make the joy thine own;
No more by pangs of guilt and fear distress'd
Rest, sweetly rest.

H. L. L.

Thirty-third.

WILL YE ALSO GO AWAY?

JOHN vi. 66, 67.—From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, will ye also go away.

THIS touching appeal was made not more than a day after the generous and glorious miracle of feeding five thousand persons in a desert place. Yet, during this short space of time, the feelings of the people of Capernaum, with respect to Jesus Christ, have undergone a very remarkable and decided revolution. Yesterday, our Lord's popularity reached its culminating point. Never before had He manifested so signally His wonderful love and mighty power; and never before had His followers displayed greater enthusiasm and devotion towards Him. It seemed as if they could not live, even for a single day, out of His presence; they follow Him over sea and land; they hasten, yea, they actually run, after Him to the city and to the wilderness, or whereso-ever He went; they hang upon His lips; from every quarter they bring their sick, that they might at least touch, as He passed by, the hem of His garment, and "as many as touched were made perfectly whole." Alas, that all this zeal and earnestness should have been so short lived! But so it was. The tide, which a very little while ago was at its height, is now at its lowest ebb.

Of the great crowds which then thronged Jesus, only a mere handful now remains. All have forsaken Him and fled. Very many have gone back and walk no more with Jesus. Even of those that continue still with Him, one at least, probably more than one, gives evidence of wavering. In these circumstances, therefore, Jesus turns round, and with a look that searched their inmost soul, says to His disciples, "Will ye also go away?" To the great crowds, hurrying back to sin and to the world, He puts no question, His heart is bleeding for them, yet He does not cry after them. He does not speak to them a single word; He knew that their hearts were never really with Him. But it is otherwise with the twelve, Judas being excepted. Hence the compassionate Saviour cannot keep silence when he sees them in danger. To them, accordingly, He appeals. Others, you see, are falling away and forsaking me, will you, who have come so much nearer to me and remained so much longer with me, follow their evil example? Will you go with the multitude or abide with me? Will you cast in your lot with the chosen few, or with the miscellaneous crowd? Which, think you, will prove the wiser, safer, and happier course at the end of the day? You must do the one thing or the other; neutrality is impossible; there is no third path of conduct open to you,—"Choose this day whom ye will serve." You are to understand, once for all, that I will have willing and hearty followers or none. Will you stand by me and follow me, even though, in all the wide world, none should be found to espouse my cause except yourselves?

This question is fraught with divine wisdom and love. It serves more than one good purpose. Our Lord did

not require to ask, on His own account or for His own benefit, whether His disciples would prove true and trustworthy followers in this dark hour of desertion and dismay. He knew that with the exception of Judas, they would all be stedfast to the very last. But it is necessary, nevertheless, to use means to secure this result. He must needs point out the great temptation to which they were exposed. He must warn them against the dreadful evil of drawing back. Many were going back and walking no more with Jesus. The history of the Church shows most convincingly that there is no sin to which fallen human nature is more prone, than declension. How often did the Israelites propose to return to Egypt. How liable were the early Christians to relapse into Judaism or heathenism. At the time of the Reformation, how many went back again to Romanism! Are there none doing so at this hour? Are there none, rather, are there not many, in every time of reviving and quickening, whose goodness proves like the morning cloud and the early dew? Who has not felt, to some extent, the downward and backward tendency? How contagious is bad example. The apostles, therefore, would have been more than human if they had not felt the force of the strong current which was bearing down against them. They were to some extent perplexed and staggered by the sudden and unexpected turn things took. Perhaps some of them felt inclined to do what so many others had done. Therefore, to lead them to realize the nature and consequences of the feeling that was beginning to rise in their hearts, as well as, of course, to check it in its very first outgoings, our Lord makes this appeal. This question, moreover, was fitted and intended to confirm them in the faith; for, although

He seems to throw the reins loose, what He really does, is to bind them closer than ever to Himself. This could not fail to be the effect of Peter's noble testimony, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." It is, as if He had said, Go from thee! never. Thy words alone reveal, impart, and sustain life. Where shall we find a master that will bring out of his stores such instructions as Thou art wont to impart? Go away from thee? To whom shall we go? Shall it be to Moses or to Mammon? to the Pharisees or to philosophers? to empty rites? to burdensome traditions? to vague abstractions? to lying vanities? to blank despair? What will these broken cisterns do to satisfy the longings of our immortal souls? Can they furnish us with pardon of sin, peace of mind, purity of nature? Thou alone canst satisfy our soul. Thou art all our salvation and all our desire; all our happiness and all our hope. To go from Thee, would be to bring down upon ourselves everlasting woe. Lord, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil One, Lord, leave us not to ourselves. Ask us not, "Will ye also go away?" Say rather unto us, come nearer unto me, cling closer unto me, follow harder after me. For whom have we in heaven but thee? and there is none in all the earth that our soul desireth beside Thee.

Let me give good heed to the very solemn and searching warning here given by my Lord and Master. Let me specially beware of the besetting sin of apostacy. I may be very anxious about the safety of my soul, and may abandon many evil habits, and perform many duties; I may greatly enjoy Christian privileges, and de-

light to hear the word of God preached; I may be an admiring and an applauding witness of the works of Jesus Christ, and seem to be greatly attached to His person; I may eat and drink in His presence, eagerly and laboriously follow Him many days, and make great sacrifices for His sake. All these things and many more besides, may be true of me as they were true of the persons to whom our question refers, and yet, after all, when the hour of trial and sifting comes, like them too, I may fall away, go back and walk no more with Jesus. Therefore, let me very narrowly examine myself, especially with respect to those truths which proved a great stumbling-block and offence to these men. In other words, let me ask, Is Christ the life-giving, the life-sustaining bread to my soul? Do I heartily believe on His name? Do I know what it is to eat His flesh and to drink His blood? Does He dwell in me and I in Him? Are these things which are written in the foregoing part of the chapter from which our text is taken "hard sayings" to me, or are they words of eternal life? Would I follow Jesus although I had not a single companion? If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. He that endureth to the end shall be saved. No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.

Thirty-fourth.

BELIEVEST THOU THIS?

JOHN xi. 26.—Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, (though he have died) yet shall he live; And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believeth thou this?

BEHOLD the sympathizing Jesus binding up the sorrow-stricken spirit, wiping away the tears of the mourner, and shedding light on the darkness of the tomb. Observe how He deals with the bereaved Martha. He gently leads her to speak on the only subject suitable to the condition in which she was placed. He invites her to think not of the doom and desolation of death, and the gloom of the grave, for on these dark themes she has already brooded too much; but He raises her thoughts to the bright, glorious, and ever-enduring realities, that lie beyond the narrow house. To the weeping sister He conveys the blessed assurance, "Thy brother shall rise again." These words, so familiar to us, contain a truth about which the greatest philosophers of the heathen world could only guess, and which even the Old Testament Scriptures only dimly reveal. It is the glorious deed of Jesus Christ to abolish death, and bring life and immortality fully and clearly to light in His gospel. He has taken away the horror of anni-

hilation by which humanity long time was haunted, and met that deep-seated panting and longing after endless existence which is universally felt. He has driven away the darkness and doubt that overspread the greatest of all questions. He has established, on a sure and certain basis, the truth of a life after death, and in so doing has satisfied one of man's most essential wants. But He has done greatly more than this.

It is indeed a very great thing to know beyond a doubt, that which so many are ignorant of, and so many too habitually forget, that the body is not the man, that earth is not all, and that the grave is not the end. It is indeed of high moment to have all uncertainty and error with regard to the future life and the world to come cleared away, and to be absolutely certain that when the spirit leaves the body it goes to the bar of God, and from the bar of God, to endless weal or woe. But although these are truths of infinite importance, they are not in themselves comforting. Endless existence may be sure, bnt endless happiness may be anything but sure. The two things are not inseparable. The Holy Scriptures tell me of a resurrection of life, but they tell me also of resurrection of damnation. There is an eternity of life, joy, and glory; but there is also an eternity of death, sorrow, and shame. Therefore the question on which my comfort depends, is not, am I to live for ever? but how and where am I to live for ever, in weal or woe, in heaven or hell?

And it is just because of the clear light which it sheds on this all-important inquiry, that the words of the question before us are so unspeakably precious and consoling. Martha has heard of a distant resurrection of her brother, but it is easy to see she is not satisfied.

Therefore Jesus speaks to her of one, not only near, but actually present in His own living person. He proclaims Himself to be the direct, immediate, and perfect remedy against death temporal, spiritual, and eternal. He says, I am the resurrection of the body, and the life of the soul. O death, I will be thy plague; O grave I will be thy destruction. I myself am the abolisher of death. I myself am the absolute life. It is all in myself. I am the Lord of the living and the dead. I have the keys of the unseen world, and can use them how and when it seems to me good. I am the author, the quickener, the sustainer of all life. For this very purpose I came into this world, that I might quicken the dead, that I might recover and restore all, and more than all sin has destroyed. Nor were these empty words. When Jesus said, I myself am the true resurrection, I myself am the true life, He meant just what He said. The words had scarcely fallen from His lips when He made them good. Immediately He goes to the grave of him who had been dead four days already. He stands face to face with death. He grapples with him in his stronghold where he is wont to reign supreme and with undisputed sway. He issues the word of command, and in a moment the gloomy portals of the grave burst open, and Lazarus comes forth. Nor was this the only occasion on which Jesus engaged hand to hand in combat with the king of terrors. He did the same thing twice before. And He was very soon to do that which was greater by far. In a few days after this, in His own person He encountered death in its most terrible form. He Himself went down into the dark valley when it was at the darkest, as the surety and sin-bearer of His people, bearing the stupendous load of a world's punishment. He

met with death, prevailed over him and robbed him of his sting, which is sin. For He died not of necessity, but willingly He laid down His life as a sacrifice. He gave not up the ghost until He could say, "*It is finished.*" And He not only laid down His life, He took it up again. He not only died, but He rose again from the dead, as He said He would do, and by so doing, Jesus Christ has not only ransomed all that believe on His name from the power of the grave, and redeemed them from the power of death, but He has become the resurrection and the life of all that is dead or drooping in all the wide universe. By reason of sin the law and authority of Jehovah are trampled in the dust. His Justice, Holiness, and Truth, are dimmed, and His revealed glory is eclipsed. In consequence of the voluntary obedience and death of the Son of God, the foul reproach is not only taken away, but all things are restored to more than their original majesty, beauty, and splendour. By reason of sin the whole creation, natural and moral, has become disjointed and disorganized, and it groans and travails in pain under the weight of the wrath and curse of the justly offended God. By taking the awful load upon Himself, Jesus repairs that which is shattered and broken, and rears up a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. By reason of sin the crown has fallen from man's head; he has lost his original purity and innocence; he has lost trust in God, all fear and all communion. He is born to an inheritance of death and despair. But, blessed be his name, all that is lost in the first Adam is recovered in the second. In virtue of what He has done and suffered on earth, and ever does in heaven, Jesus Christ is our beauty and our ornament, our joy and our crown, our

righteousness, strength, and wisdom, our peace and portion. He is the source and object of our faith, love and hope, the resurrection of our bodies, and the life of our souls.

Realize the glory of the resurrection-body. It is sown in corruption. It is liable to decay, disease, and death, and doomed to entire dissolution. But like a seed put into the ground, it will be raised up, free from every stain of pollution, and from all proneness to disorder. It is buried in the earth as a thing vile and loathsome to the sight. It will be raised up clothed with brightness, beauty, and glory. Now, it is an animal frame, consisting of flesh and blood, standing in need of food, air, rest, and adapted to an earthly mode of existence. It will be raised up a "spiritual body," fitted for our higher nature, our heavenly aspirations and employments.

Think of the excellence of the "Life" that Christ gives. It is life, the noblest and most generous, the highest and happiest that can be conceived. It is King-like, Christ-like, God-like life. It is life which never comes to an end, compared to which our existence of earth is but as a drop to the ocean, as a grain of sand to the immeasurable extent of the universe. In thy presence is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

We have seen that Jesus Christ is the Resurrection of all the bodies, and the quickener and sustainer of all the life of all the souls of His people. Is He the Resurrection and the Life to me? The answer I give to this all-important question depends on the answer I am able to give to this other question, Have I, or have I not accepted Him as the sole remedy against bodily and spiritual death? He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life. Hear, and your soul shall live.

Thirty-fifth.

WHERE HAVE YE LAID HIM?

JOHN xi. 34.—When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him?

LET us recall the story. Lazarus is nigh unto death. In their distress Martha and Mary betake themselves to their divine friend and Physician. They send unto Him saying, Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick. They do not doubt that Jesus will immediately hasten to the relief of the beloved sufferer. But it did not seem good to Him so to do. The messenger returned to Bethany alone. Long days and nights of suffering and watching slowly pass away. Lazarus is sinking rapidly. His sisters are in the greatest anxiety of mind, and the good Lord sees and knows it all, and yet He tarries where He is, and now it is too late. The last hour is come. Lazarus is dead. Despair takes the place of hope. It was not until four days after the burial that Jesus came to Bethany. Martha the active mistress of the house, was the first to hear the tidings of His approach. Although He comes at a time and in a way other than that which she had desired, with an energy and alertness all her own, she hastened forth to welcome Him. Unlike her sister she is calm and collected enough to cast on the Lord the burden of her soul. He listens to her with the deepest pity. He

tenderly leads her to tell all her sorrows and regrets. Then he converses with her on a suitable and seasonable theme. He speaks to her the only words that can shed light on the dark and silent tomb, that can give comfort to the sorrow-stricken heart. Jesus said unto her, "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth on me though he were dead, yet shall he live, whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die." Thus Martha was comforted. Mary now comes forth to meet the Lord. In her we see the features of another character and of a deeper sorrow. She is quite overwhelmed, she can scarcely walk. She is so troubled that she can hardly speak. She bursts into tears; sobbing aloud she falls down at Jesus feet, and with choking utterance she exclaims, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Another word she cannot utter. She can only lie at Jesus feet and weep. Nor did Jesus find it much easier to control His emotions. Never was the Son of God more deeply moved. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. Checking for a moment the swelling tide of feeling, He asks where have ye laid him? and when they answer, "Come and see," He could refrain Himself no longer, He mingled His tears with theirs, "Jesus wept!" See how His sympathy suited itself to the peculiar circumstances and condition of each of these devout women. He cheers the heart of Martha by uttering the most soothing and consoling truths. He condoles with Mary in a manner even more touching and tender than by words. As has been well said by a master in Israel, "with Martha He reasons, with Mary He weeps."

Why does the Lord check the torrent of His tears to ask, "where have ye laid him?" When He was in distant Perea, without hearing tidings from any one, He knew and told His disciples that Lazarus was dead. Does He now require to be told where His friend is buried? Assuredly not. Why, then, does He make enquiry? Because He would have these broken-hearted women do something else than weep. He would raise them from the dust. He would turn their thoughts into a new channel. He wishes them to conduct Him to the grave, that He may stir up faith and hope in their disconsolate hearts, and thus prepare them for the great deliverance He was about to achieve. But this was not all. He had a higher and wider purpose. Had it been merely to comfort these sorrow-stricken ones He would not have undertaken this journey, or asked this question. He did not require to come to the spot in order to do this, He had but to speak the word and doubtless Lazarus would have immediately recovered, or if dead would have come to life again. But His object now as at other times, was not merely to work the miracle, but to do so in such a way as to bring out distinctly its reality and value, and thus to manifest His own and His Father's glory. It was very important that He should act in this way on this occasion. Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem. Many of the Jews have come down to condole with Mary and Martha. Moreover, the great crisis of our Lord's life was at hand. His earthly career was almost at a end. This is one of the last opportunities He will have to convince His enemies, to confirm the faith of His friends, and to vindicate His own character and claims. It was therefore of the greatest moment that He should now act in such a way

as to prevent every suspicion of collusion between Lazarus and Himself, and to furnish clear and convincing proof of His Almighty power. And it is easy to see these purposes would not have been accomplished had He pursued any other method of procedure than that which He adopted, had He not manifested the facts of the case, that Lazarus was dead and buried, and had He not repaired to the spot and summoned the dead from the tomb in the presence of many witnesses.

What a sublime and touching spectacle here presents itself. The Son and Equal of Jehovah sheds tears. Let them who steel their hearts against human sorrow and suffering, who stifle the natural emotions of pity and sympathy—let them who think it weak and childish to weep—behold this union of greatness of mind and tenderness of feeling. Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him. Jesus wept at the grave of His friend Lazarus. My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord.

What caused these silent tears to flow? It was not merely or chiefly the loss of one very dear to His heart. It was the sight of human misery. It was sympathy with the sorrow-stricken. "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her He groaned in spirit and was troubled." His heart bled not only for His beloved Mary and Martha, but also for His deadly enemies the Jews. While He is most deeply moved by the affliction of His people, there is not a mourner on earth for whom He does not feel. Of all the children of men He is the most pitiful and tender-hearted. The tears start to His eye when He sees a brother weep. How consoling the thought!

Nor was sympathy alone the cause of His tears. A

few days ago what family on earth more united, holy and happy than that of Bethany. Perhaps the sun never shone on a household where love, purity, peace and joy were more largely felt. Alas, how soon is the lovely scene overcast by the dark cloud of sickness, sorrow and death. When the infinitely compassionate Redeemer beheld the sad and sudden change, would He fail to be struck with the contrast, would He not think of its cause? Would not the condition of the whole human family from first to last, would not its countless millions of changes and contrasts, and tombs and tears rise up before His mind? Marius wept at the sight of the ruins of Carthage; shall the all-wise, the all-merciful architect of the universe be unmoved when He beholds the noblest work of His hand laid in the dust? At that memorable hour can we doubt that the sorest pang that pierced His heaving heart, the hottest tear that scalded His cheek, was caused by the unbelief, obstinacy and folly of those whom the most extraordinary miracles could not convince, whom the most touching love and tenderness could not move. We are here reminded that the sympathy of Jesus is not only unspeakably tender, but that it is pre-eminently practical. Jesus Christ is not one of those who weep over misery without stretching out the hand to relieve it. No, where He sympathizes, He succours. He asks where have ye laid him? Bring me to the spot where comfort may be most effectually imparted. Tried and tempted one, thou needest not only soothing words, and sympathetic tears, but wisdom, strength and deliverance. All that thou requirest Jesus most willingly gives. By His words of promise, and by His Spirit, He imparts peace, patience and fortitude to the troubled heart. By His mighty

power He brings deliverance. By His over-ruling Providence He causes all things to work together for good.

In checking and controling the rising tide of feeling on this occasion, our Lord sets us all an example to moderate our grief. While we mourn let us not murmur. Let submission ever accompany sorrrow. "Let the stream of emotion be bounded and kept within its own banks."

Thirty-sixth.

HOW READEST THOU?

LUKE X. 25.—And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted Him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

A LEARNED divine, a student, and teacher of the Old Testament Scriptures, proposes to our Lord the most urgent and weighty question that can engage the thoughts of sinful man. Tell me, says he, what I must do to be saved? This is the cry of every truly awakened sinner, and what is the answer? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. This was the beautiful and direct, short and simple reply of the servant on a similar occasion. Does the Master answer this inquirer in the same way? Does He tell this man what He told Nicodemus, and many others, "Verily, Verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." "Whosoever believeth on the only begotten Son shall not perish but have everlasting life." So far from speaking after this manner to the lawyer, our Lord does the reverse. Instead of preaching to him the gospel, Jesus refers him to the law. What is written in the law? how readest thou? Instead of saying unto him, "Believe and live," He says, "*this do and thou shalt live*," ver. 28.

How is this to be explained? Does Jesus Christ contradict Himself? Does He give opposite answers to the same question? Does He make known more ways of salvation than one? God forbid.

The explanation of this seeming anomaly is to be found in the character of the person with whom our Lord here has to do. Unlike the jailor of Philippi and Nicodemus, this man is not in earnest about the great matter of eternal life. "He stood up and tempted," tried or tested Jesus. He is merely curious to know what this new and great Teacher has to say with regard to a question keenly debated among the Jews. There were many opinions among them as to how one might be saved. None of them were correct. All expected salvation by works; but whilst some laid great stress upon such outward actions as the observance of rites and ceremonies, sacrifices and washings; others, of whom this man was one, said that the essential things were to love God with all the heart, and our neighbours as ourselves. He would like to know which side of the controversy Jesus will espouse. He accordingly comes to question, and he is questioned; to test, and he is tested in turn. But our Lord deals thus with him, not for the sake of retort, but in order to arouse him from the condition of spiritual security into which he had fallen. He was self-righteous. It is significantly said of him, "he was willing to justify himself." Therefore he takes his stand on the footing of the law, and to the law he is sent. The lawyer did not ask how eternal life is to be sought, but on what terms he might establish a meritorious claim to it. Therefore our Lord requested him to state what conditions the law prescribed as essential to the obtaining of salvation. He was not

slow to reply. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself. His statement is quite scriptural, being taken from Deut. vi. 5, and Lev. xix. 18. Accordingly Christ said, "Thou hast answered right, *this do*, and thou shalt live." "Thou hast repeated correctly the words that inculcate the duties, and this is easy enough. But the real difficulty remains to be grappled with. Hast thou, or hast thou not, done these things? Hast thou, or hast thou not, yielded perfect obedience to these commandments? If thou hast done so, eternal life is thine. But if thou hast not done so, and never canst do so, then thou art guilty of sin, and consequently liable to condemnation and death, and therefore eternal life is not thine, and never can be thine, until thou seekest elsewhere, and in some other way than thou hast been doing."

According to the teaching of Christ, and of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, all men are under the law of God. If they obey the commandments they will enter into life. But what kind of obedience is required? It is everywhere emphatically declared that the law cannot demand less than what is just and right, that is perfect compliance with all its injunctions. Imperfect obedience will not satisfy it. It admits of no compromise, or abatement of its claims. It denounces death as the penalty of transgression. It pronounces its curse upon every one that continues not to do all that it requires. Therefore it follows, that if this man, or any man, seek to obtain eternal life on account of obedience to the law of God, he must see to it, not that his good actions are more numerous than his evil actions:

not that the repentance and righteousness of to-day will atone for the sins of yesterday: not that he is holier than other men, and does a great many things that others leave undone: but that he is absolutely spotless and perfectly righteous. If no one can pretend to be immaculate, if all have sinned, this is sufficient to prove that it is utterly impossible to obtain eternal life by the works of the law. Accordingly, our Lord proceeds to deal with this lawyer in such a way as to convince him that he has sinned, especially in the discharge of the duty he owed to his neighbour. He spoke to him the parable of the good Samaritan, and brought him to pass sentence of condemnation upon himself. Hence we see that the great aim and design of the question, put to the lawyer, was to awaken him to a sense of his guilt and danger, that he might cast himself on the mercy of God through Jesus Christ.

Our Lord here points out one of the great uses of the law of God. The law is a schoolmaster to lead us unto Christ, that we may be justified by faith. The law sweeps away the refuges of lies, that we may seek the true Hiding-Place. It overturns the house erected by the sinner on the sand, that he may build on the Rock of Ages. It shows man his own nothingness and emptiness, that he may be prepared to welcome the all-fulness of Jesus Christ. The law is the lance which lays open the swelling of pride and corruption, and makes ready for the application of the healing Balm of Gilead. The law is the ploughshare, that tears up the fallow ground, that the good seed of the gospel may have suitable soil in which to take root and grow up unto eternal life.

In appealing to the written word, our Lord recognizes Holy Scripture as the only Rule of Faith and Practice. He knows that the Jews own the authority of Tradition,

but He disowns it. Ye make the word of God of none effect by your traditions. In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. He invariably refers to the Scriptures alone. The sacred volume contains a full and complete, a clear and plain revelation of all things necessary to be known. The Bible should be the sole and supreme judge of all religious controversies. To it, and neither to pope nor potentate, to ancient father nor general council, convocation, congregation or assembly, the ultimate appeal should ever be made.

In making use of the Scriptures, it is of the greatest importance ever to keep in view these two things. First, what is written? Second, How we read? The first question is not, what is the opinion of others, or what is the view I am inclined to take, but, what saith God Himself? To ascertain what the Scriptures declare, it is necessary, not only to divest my mind of the influence of authority, but I must also calmly and patiently study; not isolated passages merely, but the general scope and bearing of the whole scheme of Revelation. In other words, I am not to skim, but, as our Lord commands, "to search the Scriptures." And let me take heed how I read. If the Scriptures are the Word of God I should peruse them with reverence, as if I were listening to the High and Lofty One. How presumptuous to read the Holy oracles of God, not to learn from them, but to judge them. I should read the Bible thoughtfully, lovingly, and with a desire to act upon all its instructions, just as a dutiful child reads the letter of a wise and beloved father. Above all, I should read the Word of God prayerfully, that I may receive the interpretation of the Holy Ghost.

Thirty-Seventh.

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

LUKE x. 36.—Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

A TRAVELLER was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. The road between these two cities lies through a wild and lonely district. At the time of our story it was much frequented by robbers; and part of it had been the scene of so many murders, that it was called the red or bloody way. Therefore we do not wonder when we are told, that this man was soon surrounded by a band of highwaymen, who sprang upon him from their hiding-place, and attacked him with the fury of beasts of prey. A short and fearful struggle followed, during which they stabbed him once and again; knocked him down to the ground, robbed him of all he had, stripping off even the clothes that covered his wounded body. Having done these things, and looked hurriedly around, they hastened from the spot leaving the wretched man lying on the road, naked, bleeding, groaning, and at the point of death. In all that land there was not another highway, where an unfortunate traveller was more likely to meet with those who understood what is due to one in distress. For the town of Jericho enclosed within its walls thousands of priests, some of whom were always travelling to or from Jeru-

salem, where they served in the temple of God by turns. And so it was, when this miserable man was lying in this woful plight, and growing weaker and weaker every moment from loss of blood, that there came down a certain priest that way. He was returning home from his service in the sanctuary of God. He was clothed in priestly garb, and the holder of the most sacred office. He knew and taught the law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." He ought to be a pattern of good works. Yesterday he stood in the presence of Jehovah, offered sacrifices, and lifted up his eyes to heaven. Can a poor sufferer fall into better hands? Surely this must be a noble and tender-hearted man, ever ready, as the Master he served, to help the helpless. When we think who he was, where he had been, and what he had been doing, this is what we might have expected. This, however, was very far from being the case. Instead of hasting to succour this miserable sufferer, he did not even take the trouble to cross the road, to see in what state he was. Turning away his eyes, he passed by on the other side, and left the man to bleed to death. Not long afterwards, a Levite, another minister of religion, though of humbler rank—came to the spot. He was not one whit more humane. He drew near to the dying man, saw his agony, heard his groans, and then steeling his heart against the rising feelings of pity, he too, passed by on the opposite side of the road. What a scandal! what a curse! were these two men to the religion of purity and love. Doubtless, their deceitful hearts would furnish them with enough of excuses for their heartlessness and cruelty. "It is as much as my life is worth, to linger at this perilous spot. The bloody robbers cannot be very far off. As for this man, I do

not know anything about him. He is neither my fellow-traveller nor my friend. He has no claims upon me. I have not time to spare. Besides, I do not really see what I can do for him. The man is mortally wounded. His death is only a question of time. It is a hopeless case." Thus they forbear to deliver him that was drawn unto death. They care not whether the man live or die.

Shamefully neglected by men of his own nation, and ministers of his own religion, what hope is left to the sinking traveller? Succour comes to him at last from the most unexpected quarter. "A certain Samaritan as he journeyed came where he was." This man is a foreigner, one of that community with whom the Jews had no dealings, and whom they hated and reviled as heretics, heathens, and dogs. He might have pleaded, with better reason, all the excuses we have supposed the priest and Levite to make, and he might have added with truth, "If I tarry here I will be seized, tried, and punished for this outrage." But other thoughts were in his heart. Forgetful of personal safety and the pressure of business, rising above all the narrow prejudices of country and of creed, he makes haste to help. As soon as he saw the sufferer, his heart was touched with the tenderest pity. He springs from his saddle, stoops over the man, and finding that the spark of life has not gone out, he begins tenderly to bind up the wounds, to pour on them wine and oil in order to staunch the bleeding, and to cleanse and heal. As soon as the man began to rally, he raised him in his arms, set him on his own beast, and holding him on as he walked beside him, brought him slowly to an inn, and there took care that he should have nursing and rest during the night. Not

content with what he had already done, on the next morning, when business called him away, the Samaritan brought to a noble end that which he had so nobly begun, with many orders, he entrusted the feeble stranger to the keeping of the landlord, left with him a sum of money large enough to meet the outlay of several days and undertook on his return to defray all further charges.

Having spoken this parable, our Lord turned to the lawyer who "stood up and tempted him," and whom, as we have seen, he had already questioned, ver. 25, and asked, which of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour to him that fell among the thieves, was it the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan? Was it they who neglected, or he who exercised the duty of compassion? Constrained by conscience, the lawyer replies, "He that showed mercy." In putting this question and extorting this answer, our Lord in a most masterly way accomplished three important purposes. In the first place, He compelled His questioner to answer with his own lips his own question, "who is my neighbour?" and that too in a way contrary to all his previous ideas. In admitting that the despised Samaritan had acted the part of a neighbour to a Jew in distress, he virtually admitted that the Jew was bound to act the part of neighbour to the Samaritan, for of course the obligation must be mutual. It was as if he had said, it is sinful to limit my compassion and love to my own nation, my own party, to my own church, my own family. I am to regard *every man*, be he who he may, as my neighbour, especially I am to regard as my neighbour, every one thrown upon my humanity and whom I have it in my power to help. I am bound to do my utmost for all who are known to be in distress, in want, or in sorrow; and in giving aid, the

good Samaritan is to be my model. No account is to be made of personal safety, or the calls of business, the loss of time or of money. In the second place, our Lord constrained the lawyer to pass sentence of condemnation upon himself, and all his fellow-countrymen, who avowedly limited their sympathy and benevolence to those belonging to their own nation and religion. In the third place, by putting this question and calling forth this reply, our Lord proved, as we have seen already, that as this man had been guilty of sin, he could not be saved by his own works.

From the earliest times, men have seen in this story or parable, "a hidden and higher sense." Jerusalem the city of purity and peace, is man's original condition of innocence and bliss. Jericho, the "cursed and doomed city," is the place of woe. The traveller going *down* from the one to the other is Adam, the head of the human race, departing from the city and society of the living God. The blood-thirsty robbers who waylay, strip, and wound, represent the devil, the roaring lion, the murderer from the beginning. He takes from man the robe of original righteousness, robs him of the image of God stamped on his soul, smites him with all kinds of pains and diseases, and leaves him dead in trespasses and sins. The priest and Levite that do nothing to deliver from a condition of utter helplessness and danger, are the Law and its works, which can neither take away sin, nor give life to the sinner, neither clothe nor heal his bleeding soul. The good Samaritan who comes when all other hope fails, who is so kind and considerate, is the Lord Jesus Christ who came into this world to bind up the broken-hearted. His blood, of which wine is the chosen emblem, washes away our

sins. His Spirit, of which oil is the type, heals and restores our souls.

Let me do all that in me lies to realize and to imitate the matchless pity and love of Jesus Christ. What my Elder Brother is and has been to me, let me try to be to my brother man. Let me make Him my pattern in all things.—"Go and do thou likewise."

Thirty-eighth.

WHERE ARE THE NINE?

LUKE xvii. 17.—And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?

OUR Lord is now travelling toward Jerusalem. In the course of His journey which lay along the border line of Samaria and Galilee, He came "to a certain village." Before He entered it, there met Him ten men which were lepers. What a sad and frightful sight do these poor sufferers present. Their clothes are rent, their heads bare, and their upper lips covered. Their skin is scurfy, ghastly pale, and covered all over with foul blotches and sores. Their lips are swollen, and their features disfigured. Some of them have lost joints of their fingers, others are without hands, all are somehow maimed and crippled. Their breath is polluted, their blood poisoned, their whole frame bears the marks of dissolution and decay. They are walking corpses rather than living men. From the crown of their heads to the soles of their feet, there is no soundness in them, there is nought but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores. They are labouring under the most loathsome disease flesh is heir to, and which, therefore, God has chosen as the type and emblem of sin. Some of these ten men are Jews, others, (one at least) belong to the hated Samaria, but the pressure of a common calamity has levelled all national distinctions, and united them to-

gether by a fellow-feeling. They are standing outside the gate of the village, for the law of Moses required that the leper should dwell apart, without the town or camp. Of all sufferers he was the only one denied the solace of home and the sympathy of friends. To touch him was to touch a dead body. To prevent any one from coming near him, he was ever to cry aloud, *Unclean, Unclean.* Why this exclusion? It was not because leprosy was a catching disease, for of this there is no proof: but because it was the symbol of sin. It was to teach, that all who live and die spiritually leprous, shall be for ever shut out from the Holy City above and from the fellowship of the living God, and the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. There shall in no wise enter into it, any thing that defileth. The filthy shall be filthy still, and with the filthy for evermore. But though the lepers must needs "stand afar off," they are not condemned to silence. They have heard of the coming of Jesus, and hope springs up in hearts long hopeless. They know their opportunity and are resolved to improve it to the utmost. Therefore, as "the drowning passengers of a sinking ship* scream for help, to the passing vessel," so these men raise their hoarse, rough, broken voices, and loudly and earnestly cry; "Jesus, master have mercy on us." Their prayer is not made in vain, for, "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also and him that hath no helper." As soon as their wail of distress fell upon His ear, the heart of Jesus was touched with tenderest compassion, He immediately turned towards them and cried with a loud voice; "Go, shew yourselves unto the priest."—Act as if your leprosy were already cured.—Go,

* Moody Stuart.

as the law of Moses requires, and get your cure officially declared. The great Physician does not bind Himself to one uniform method of healing. He varies His treatment according to the character of His patients. One leper He cures on the spot, in a moment, putting forth His hand and touching him and saying, "I will, be thou clean." Towards these ten men, He acts otherwise. He answers their cry of distress at once, but He does not heal them immediately. He puts their faith and obedience to the test, in the first place. Before they are cleansed, before they can feel or see in themselves or in their fellows, any indications of health, they are ordered to act as if they were already, every whit, whole. They might with great show of reason have made objections and raised difficulties with regard to the injunction they had received. They might have said, it is absurd and ridiculous to go and show ourselves, as we are just now, to the priest. But they are of another spirit, as soon as they heard the word of command, "Go:" they go without asking one question. They do their part, and as is ever the case, they soon find, He who commanded them, had not failed to do His part. "*As they went*" along in the prescribed path, "*they were cleansed.*" Behold the infinite power and love of Jesus Christ! Here we have, not one, but ten miracles! The long-continued disease departs. The flesh of the lepers becomes fairer and fresher than that of a child. Feebleness gives place to manly vigour, loathsome sickness to robust health, hideous deformity to perfect symmetry and beauty. How great must have been the surprise and delight of these men. Surely their hearts must be overflowing with gratitude. Surely they will hasten back as one man, and cast themselves at the feet of their Benefactor. Alas, it was not so.

Of all the ten that were healed only one returns to make acknowledgment of the benefit received. He, indeed, feels he cannot be too thankful. When he was a great way off, he is heard proclaiming, with a loud voice, to all the world, the glory of God and the praise of Jesus Christ. He, who, a little while ago, "stood afar off," hastens to draw near. With lowliest humility he casts himself down at the feet of Jesus, and thanks Him with all his heart and soul. The man who so beautifully manifested true thankfulness, was a despised Samaritan, one who had enjoyed privileges much inferior to those of his highly favoured companions, who were probably Jews. Gratitude for past mercies secures greater and better blessings in the time to come. Therefore Jesus said unto him. "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole." He dismissed him, not only by sealing the outward cure, but by adding to it the infinitely more precious blessing of spiritual health. In proportion as the Lord was pleased with the thankfulness of the one, He was grieved and disappointed with the insensibility and ingratitude of the nine. He asks with indignation and astonishment, Were not all the ten cleansed? (for He was aware of the fact although it took place at a distance,) "but where are the nine?"

Have none of them returned to give glory to God, save this foreigner? Have they no hearts to feel, no tongue to express, the greatness of the benefit they have received? They are rejoicing in the good that has been done to them, have they no thought of Him by whom it has been done? They were loud in crying for deliverance, and now that the greatest earthly blessing is theirs, have they no grateful acknowledgment to make? It is even so. What monsters of impiety and ingratitude! Do they not deserve to be struck with another leprosy, sevenfold

worse than the first? Their silence is proof that they have been thus smitten long since.

In condemning the conduct, of these men, are we not passing sentence against ourselves? The fact that nine out of ten failed to give glory to God on this occasion, shows that true gratitude is one of the rarest of sentiments, and therefore that ingratitude is one of the most common of sins. Of all the multitude of rational and accountable beings whom God has created, sustained and blessed, how many give to Him the glory that is due? Of the vast number of persons raised up from beds of sickness and restored to health, how many render according to the benefit done to them? What a small proportion give evidence of true thankfulness in their subsequent life!

Ingratitude is the child of pride and selfishness, a child which can speak only one word, which it never ceases to utter, "Give, Give." Ingratitude is a sin rebuked by every thing in nature. The ox knows its owner. The dog licks the hand of its master. Ingratitude is a sin which even the heathen writers brand with the deepest detestation. It is a sin against which the whole world raises a clamour. It is a sin utterly without excuse, for none are so poor as not to have a heart to feel, and a tongue to speak. In the word of God, the unthankful are classed with the basest of sinners. It is a sin which Jesus Christ marks with peculiar displeasure.

Let me ask myself, has my soul been cleansed from the leprosy of sin? If I believe it has been purified, let me proclaim to all the world, by my lips and my life the grace of God. Is my soul not cleansed? How dreadful my condition! Let me apply without delay to Jesus, lest I should be shut out for ever from the pure city of the Living God.

Thirty-ninth.

LACKED YE ANYTHING?

LUKE xxii. 35.—And He said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing.

THIS question refers to that memorable day when our Lord called the twelve together, and sent them forth for the first time to preach the gospel. He gave them power over unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. In obedience to the Master's command, the apostles made no provision beforehand for their journey. They took with them neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, nor scrip, nor two coats, nor any sandals except those that were on their feet. They did not procure expressly for the occasion even so much as a staff. They went forth just as they were, in simple dependence on Him who sent them. Thus they set out. They were as sheep in the midst of hungry wolves. And how did it fare with them? Were they left destitute? Did they suffer great hardships?

"Lacked ye anything? They said, nothing." They testify that their Master's promises were all fulfilled. All their fears were disappointed. All their wants were supplied. Everywhere hearts and homes were opened to receive them. They were comfortably entertained by day and lodged by night. "They were

supported by the voluntary contributions of those among whom they laboured." They sowed spiritual, and they reaped, in good measure, carnal things.

Mark the tender and watchful care which Jesus exercises over His people. In the days of His flesh, when He was in a state of humiliation, as we have seen, He sent forth His apostles into the world without any temporal provision. His providence furnished them with everything. Now that He is exalted in the heavens, is He less able to provide for His followers and friends? Let us obey His commands, let us pursue the path He points out, and assuredly He will give us food and clothing, liberty and protection, and everything of which we stand in need. Let us banish from our minds distrust. Let us lift our eyes to Him, and cast the burden upon Him. He has all power in heaven and on earth, and He has promised to supply all that is really necessary for the life that now is, as well as for that which is to come. "There is no want to them that fear God." "The young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that fear the Lord shall not want any good thing." The most daring and powerful of ungodly men may be reduced to utter destitution. "The youths may faint and be weary, and the young men may utterly fall;" but "the Lord is a sun and shield, no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." The children of God are not exempt from the changes of this shifting world. They do not enjoy uninterrupted plenty. In common with other men, they have trials, and toils, and straits. Like their Master they may live and die in poverty. They may be indebted to charity for a grave. But though poor like unto Him, like unto Him also they will never feel real want. Whatever is given unto

them or withheld from them, they constantly enjoy a large measure of that contentment which itself is a perpetual feast. The fig-tree may not blossom, but the tree of life is always laden with ripe and varied fruit. The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. Those who possess Jesus Christ cannot really lack any good thing. He contains all blessings in Himself. If I have Christ I cannot lack the necessaries of true life, for He is the soul-satisfying manna, the bread that came down from heaven, of which, if a man eat, he shall never die. He is the living water that quenches all the desires of the soul. Those who have Christ cannot lack health, for He is the balm of Gilead, and the physician who healeth all manner of spiritual sickness and disease. They cannot lack real liberty, for He hath given His life a ransom for them, and they know the truth, and the truth hath made them free. They cannot lack guidance, for He is the way in all the wanderings of life; nor happiness, for in Him they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. God is the strength of their heart and their portion for ever. He giveth unto all His sheep eternal life, "and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of His hand." In Him are all the well-springs of life, in His presence there is fulness of joy, at His right hand are pleasures for evermore.

Ask any child of God, ask him of longest life and largest experience, who has been most deeply exercised in conflict and in adversity, with regard to this point, and will he not make the apostle's statement his own, and testify I have lacked nothing. Listen, for example, to the words of Joshua, uttered at the end of a long, hazardous, and chequered life. He is standing in the presence of all Israel, with one foot, so to speak, already

in the grave, and in fullest view of death and judgment, and what does he say? "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth, and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you. All are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." He confidently challenges them to mention so much as one thing that was awanting.

How different is the condition of those that are strangers to Jesus Christ. Whilst the believer lacks nothing, the unbeliever lacks everything. What are all my possessions if I have neither part nor lot with Jesus Christ? Without Christ the sweetest cup is bitter, the greatest wealth is poverty, the highest glory is shame. They that lack Jesus Christ lack spiritual health, and life, and peace; and, worst of all, they lack the knowledge of their wants. "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

What a striking proof is here suggested of the power and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ! When the potentates of this world despatch ambassadors to transact their affairs of state, they find it necessary to furnish them beforehand with the means of support and defence. When Christ sends forth His messengers He is under no such necessity. For all events and agencies are in His hand. The hearts of all men are under His sway, and He moves them according to His will. He causes even the wrath of men to praise Him. Hence, although His apostles go forth without the ordinary means of subsistence, and without rank, learning, and influence,

they lacked nothing essential to the successful prosecution of the stupendous enterprise to which they were called.

What encouragement is here given to unquestioning obedience to mysterious and painful commands! When they were on the threshold of the land flowing with milk and honey, the Israelites were ordered to turn back and wander in a barren desert. Did not this look like courting destruction? Yet, as long as they walked in the path God pointed out, they lacked nothing. Water flowed from the flinty rock. Bread was rained from heaven. During forty years their raiment and shoes neither wore out nor waxed old. Precisely similar, as we have seen, was the experience of the twelve apostles, and so, doubtless, it will ever fare with all those who go forward on the path of duty at the command of God.

If we would be prepared for coming trials, let us ponder the lessons of experience. It was to equip the disciples for fast approaching danger that the Master invited them on this occasion to review the past.

Fortieth.

OF WHOM DO KINGS TAKE TRIBUTE?

MAT. xvii. 25.—What thinkest thou Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?

JESUS is returning from the feast of tabernacles to Capernaum, "his own city." No question is put to Him. But Peter who comes after is asked, "Doth not your Master pay tribute?" The impost, now for the first time demanded of Capernaum's greatest Benefactor, was religious not civil, and due not to Cæsar, but to God. It was payable not to the treasury of Rome, but to the temple of Jerusalem. It was the half shekel levied yearly, according to the law of Moses, upon every individual, as a ransom for his soul. It went to defray the expenses connected with the public worship of God, first in the Tabernacle and afterwards in the Temple. Accordingly, the persons who came to Peter were not the publicans or ordinary tax-gatherers; but they were servants of the chief priests and scribes. In other words they were the representatives of the Church, and not of the State. And how does Peter meet this demand? With characteristic rashness and haste, he replies, that his Master does pay tribute. Very recently, Peter has confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God: therefore He is infinitely greater than the temple, *a*

son over, and not a servant or subordinate in the house of God. A very short time ago, the relation between our Lord and the rulers of the Jews, had undergone a change; moreover Jesus has just declared, that He is the great reality of which the temple and all its rites were merely symbols. Yet notwithstanding all these things, it does not seem to Peter strange, that his Master should pay the temple-tax; therefore, when he comes into the house, he begins, as a matter of course, to relate what he had said. "*Jesus prevented him.*" Although His back was turned upon them, He knew all that had taken place, He had observed all that had been done on the one side and on the other. Hence He anticipates what Peter was about to tell, by asking this question, "What thinkest thou Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children or of strangers?" On what grounds am I to pay this tax? The children of the potentates of this world are not liable to pay tribute money. Is the Son of the eternal God, the blessed and only potentate, not to enjoy a similar exemption? And why not? Does the Redeemer of millions of immortal beings require to give a ransom for His own soul? Is He who is the true temple to contribute to the support of an edifice which has no use or meaning, except as a representation of Himself?

Our Lord was remarkable for the general submissiveness of His Spirit, He scrupulously observed all the requirements of the law ceremonial, as well as of the law moral and political. Therefore, He must have had some weighty reason, for making an exception on this occasion. Consequently it is of great importance to ascertain the grounds of His procedure at this time. The basis of His argument is evidently this, that He

stood in precisely the same relation to the God of Israel, as the members of a royal family on earth stand to their father. As the children of a Sovereign of this world do not contribute to the national exchequer, so, the Son of God should not pay for the support of His Father's house, that is, the temple. "If the sons are always free from tribute, then it follows, that on me, the Son of God, this tax has no claim." The obligation to contribute to support the state of an earthly prince, instead of being lessened is much increased by highness of rank. The refusal of an obscure subject of the realm to pay tribute, might be regarded as comparatively a trivial offence; but suppose the wealthiest noble, or the first minister of the crown, were to decline to contribute to the revenue; he would be regarded as guilty of a crime of the deepest dye, his conduct would be construed as treason. Apply this principle to the case in hand. If, as many allege, Jesus Christ is merely the most exalted of created intelligences—"a super-angelical being"—the highest subject in the realm of Jehovah, it is sinful in the extreme, to object to pay, or to pay with an explanation, that sum to which the rich, not less then the poor in Israel were liable. The only ground on which He could warrantably claim exemption, is that of proper equality and oneness of nature with God. The question has no meaning unless it amounts to an assertion of essential Deity on the part of the Saviour. In virtue of His Sonship, His eternal and ineffable generation, He possesses the same nature, dignity, duration and prerogatives with the Father, He is the Creator, Controller, Sustainer, and therefore the Possessor of all things. He is the dearly beloved, the only begotten of God, He is His own proper Son, the darling of His

soul, the delight of his heart, He is the occupant of His bosom, the object of eternal, unlimited and most tender love, the sharer of His deepest counsels and highest glory. But this portion of Scripture furnishes evidence, that though He was in the form of God and thought it not robbery to be equal wtth God, He made Himself of no reputation and took upom Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. Though rich, for our sake He became poor, so poor, that He was at this moment, unable to pay a claim which did not exceed half a shekel or twenty pence. But let it not be supposed, that when He became man, He ceased to be God,—He is now, He always has been, He ever shall be Divine. Accordingly, even at this moment of apparent destitution, He obtained the needed contribution, in such a way, as to show that all the resources of nature were under His control. "Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up, and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money, that take and give unto them for me and thee."

Although Jesus asserted He did not on this occasion stand upon His divine rights, lest His refusal should prove the occasion of offence or stumbling to any who were yet ignorant of the relation in which He stood to His Father, He agreed to pay the tribute, as it were under protest. There are occasions on which we may warrantably waive our rights and abate somewhat from our lawful claims. We are to follow after the things that make for peace, we are to be harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. But we are to be careful lest we

should comprmise our Christian character or the honour of Jesus intrusted to our keeping.

There is pointed out to us in this part of Scripture the position which the Lord Jesus Christ claims in the temple of His visible Church. He is subject to none. He is not liable to pay those dues which all creatures owe to God. He is King on the holy hill of Zion. He is a son over, not a subject in, the house of God. He is the only Head of the Church. He will have no rival, no vicar, no colleague, no coadjutor. He is very jealous, as we have seen, of His Sovereign rights.

Let me submit to His authority, obey His law and depend upon His power, and I too shall be free, I shall enjoy the glorious liberty of God's children, I shall be free from the yoke of Satan, from the thraldom of the world, from the curse of the law and from the slavery of sin.

Forty-first.

IS IT LAWFUL TO DO GOOD ON THE SABBATH DAY?

MARK iii. 4.—And He saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life or to kill?

THIS question was put to the Scribes and Pharisees in the synagogue of Capernaum. In the opinion of these men, our blessed Lord has already been guilty of several acts of Sabbath breaking, and they are on the watch for similar offences. Nor have they long to wait, for behold there was a man there which had a withered hand, and the Scribes and Pharisees watch Him whether He would heal on the Sabbath. But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up and stand forth in the midst; and turning to them, He asked, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day?" We think this inquiry was intended to show the Scribes and the Pharisees that the opinions which they held regarding the observance of the Sabbath were erroneous. In their hands, the seventh day had become a burden and a bondage instead of a blessing. They had loaded the Sabbath law with a multitude of traditionary restrictions entirely alien to its nature. Their view was substantially this, that in no case or circumstance was it lawful to depart

from the strict letter of the commandment, "*thou shalt not do any work.*" On a very recent occasion (see Matt. xii. 1-8, Mark ii. 23-28, Luke vi. 1-5), our Lord dealt at great length with this opinion. In the *first place*, He showed that it was contradicted by the practice of David, whom they regarded as an eminently holy man. Under the pressure of necessity, he went into the tabernacle and ate the shew-bread. Why, then, might not these disciples relieve their hunger by rubbing a few ears of corn? In the *second place*, our Lord pointed out that these formalists were inconsistent, for on every Sabbath they observed certain rites and ceremonies, all of which, especially the offering of an animal in sacrifice, involved labour on the part of the priests. In the *third place*, our Lord directed their attention to a great and comprehensive principle laid down in the Old Testament. "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." An act of mercy in the sight of God is of higher value and greater importance than the performance of outward observances. In the *fourth place*, our Lord states that the Sabbath was made or instituted for the welfare of man, and therefore its rigid observance is to be set aside when incompatible therewith. In the *fifth place*, He concluded with the argument, "*Therefore*, the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath." Matt. xii. 8.

The *Son of man* is the Head and Representative, and Lord of the human race; hence, if the Sabbath day, as is expressly stated, is designed for men everywhere—not for one nation—but the whole human family, it follows, by necessary consequence, that He is its Lord, and therefore, He is entitled to change the time or mode of its observance. "*He is the Lord of the Sabbath, not surely to abolish it*—(a strange Lordship)—*but to own it*,

to interpret it, to preside over it, to ennoble it and merge it into the Lord's day." Having stated these arguments on a former occasion, our Lord now returns to the subject by asking this question, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days or to do evil? to save life or to kill?" In the gospel by Matt. xii. 11, the question is presented in another form. "What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it and lift it out?" Would any of you hesitate to do an act of mercy on the Sabbath, to a sheep? Is it, then, a sin to do an act of mercy to a man? The former, as much as the latter, is contrary to the letter of the law, "*thou shalt not do any work.*"

It is evident from these statements of our Lord, that all along, even in Old Testament times, there were exceptions to the Sabbath law. The question immediately arises, how many and what kind of exceptions are there to be? The only kinds of exceptional works sanctioned either by the example or precepts of our Lord, are those of necessity and mercy.

If it was the design of our Lord, as some think, entirely to abolish the Sabbath law, is it unreasonable to ask, why on such an occasion as this did He not say so in plain terms? Why should He have been at such pains to explain and defend an institution that He meant to set aside? Why add argument after argument, as we have seen He did, with regard to it? He did not hesitate to declare that other things, as for example the temple and its worship, were to be swept away. If He really meant to put an end to this also, why did He not say so in like manner? Is it possible to produce from the gospels any other Jewish and temporary observ-

ance which our Lord explained or defended, as He explained and defended the Sabbath? There is no such thing to be found in the gospels.

It is freely granted that it is impossible to produce an express command for the change of the day. But no one acquainted with Scripture can deny, that it has pleased God, to inculcate great doctrines and duties, indirectly, as well as directly; implicitly, as well as by express words. We are taught by example, as well as by precept. It was on the first day of the week that our Lord rose from the dead—that He repeatedly met with His assembled disciples during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension. It was on the first day of the week that He went up into heaven. It was on the first day of the week that the Pentecostal effusion of the Holy Ghost took place, and three thousand persons were converted—that the New Testament Church was constituted, and that the Lord's Supper was celebrated. All this is stated in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles. It was when John "*was in the Spirit on the Lord's day*," that he beheld the Vision and received the revelation recorded in the last book of Scripture. The first day of the week has been uniformly observed as the Christian Sabbath by the Church, from the primitive ages down to the present time, and it cannot be doubted that God has greatly honoured that day by conferring blessings on His people.

The Sabbath should be regarded, not as an arbitrary appointment, but as a noble boon, a most benevolent Institution, fitted and intended to promote the physical, intellectual, moral and religious benefit of man. Physicians testify that the rest of the Sabbath is essential to bodily health. Employers have proved by repeated experiments, that, at the end of a year, more work is done

and better done, by labouring six, than by labouring seven days of the week. Observation and experience show that those who habitually enjoy the rest, study the subjects, and engage in the exercise to which the Sabbath calls, are happier, more intelligent, enterprising, independent, trustworthy, and prosperous, than those who habitually neglect these things. In every country in the world, morality and religion prosper or perish, advance or decline, according as the Sabbath is observed or despised.

The Sabbath day is the rest of the sons and daughters of toil. It is the educator and the elevator of the ignorant assembled in church or school. It is the bulwark which prevents or limits the progress of oppression and covetousness. It is the antidote against those manifold and ever-recurring cases which enfeeble, degrade, and demoralize the mind. It is the restorative of the hard-wrought body and the hard-wrought spirit. It is the birthright of our race. It is the memorial of Creation and of Redemption. It is the harbinger and foretaste of everlasting rest and glory. It is "The Lord's Day" (Rev. i. 10), claimed by the Lord Jesus as His own. It is not mine—it is His holy and therefore happy day, to be devoted to His service, His worship, His glory. As one has well said, "Everything that leads to the Lord Jesus Christ is Sabbath observance, everything that leads from Him is Sabbath desecration."

Forty-second.

WHO IS MY MOTHER?

MATT. xii. 48.—But He answered and said unto him that told Him, Who is my mother? And who are my brethren?

OUR Lord has been faithfully and fearlessly rebuking the Pharisees—the most powerful sect in the community in which He lived. He did not spare them. He denounced them as an evil and adulterous generation, and declared that the heathen Queen of Sheba, who came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and the Ninevites, who repented at the preaching of Jonah, should rise up in the Judgment and condemn them. He compared their condition to that of an unclean spirit, which, on "returning to his house and finding it empty, swept and garnished, takes to himself seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and whose last state is therefore worse than his first." These awful words, spoken in the hearing of a vast multitude of people, filled the Pharisees with rage.

Having seen this, and having observed the great excitement that had arisen, the mother of Jesus, and the other members of His family became much alarmed. They thought He had lost His reason. "They said he is beside himself." Something must be done, therefore they hasten to the scene of danger. They went out to lay hold on Him; to take Him home by force

and keep Him in arrest for a season. Having come to the house where He was, they found Him still pouring forth the words of warning and denunciation; but notwithstanding, He is calm, dignified, and self-possessed. As "they could not come at Him for the press," they stood without, and sent from mouth to mouth a message, "Behold thy mother and brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee." Knowing the object they had in view, and engaged as He then was, in the discharge of a public duty, not more painful than pressing, our Lord could not fail to regard this message as being alike unreasonable and presumptuous. It deserved the gravest censure.

But observe how wisely Jesus acts in the peculiarly difficult and delicate position into which He has been brought by His relatives. How skilfully He tempers mercy with severity, the tenderest feeling with the most uncompromising faithfulness. "He answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" And He looked round about on them which sat about Him, "and he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." It is as if He had said, My brother, my sister, my mother, wist ye not, that I must be about my Father's business? What have I to do with you? What have ye to do with me when I am engaged in the great work which He hath given me to do? I know, I listen to no brother, sister, or mother, who would stop or turn me aside in my high calling. I can permit no relative, not even the nearest and dearest on earth, to encroach upon, or to interfere with my divine pre-

rogative. Elisha bade farewell to father and mother when he became a prophet of the Lord. Ezekiel was commanded to make no lamentation for his wife when she died. The Levitical priest "said to his father and mother I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children." You have heard me forbid a man to go and bury his father, and command him rather to follow me. And do you believe that He whom the Father hath sent and sealed as the Saviour of the world, will abandon, even for a moment, the prosecution of His stupendous enterprise? In all my mediatorial work I know no human being after the flesh. I know and listen to Jehovah, and none else.

But Jesus did not stop here. He did not deem it enough to check their interference, and emphatically to assert His own independence. He did not affirm, as we might have expected, I have neither brother, sister, nor mother on earth. On the contrary, so far from renouncing, He recognizes, elevates, and enlarges in a very wonderful way, the home of His affections. He does not say that He does not love His earthly relatives, for He had the most loving heart that ever throbbed in human breast. But He declares that His true disciples are His nearest relatives. All the members of the household of faith enjoy the dignity and blessedness of His brother, sister, and mother. The hallowed circle of His love is neither narrow nor exclusive. The sympathies of our Elder Brother are not bound to a select few. They go forth to all the orphaned children of men. The poorest, the most ignorant, the most obscure follower of Jesus Christ is as warmly loved, and as fondly cherished, as were His kinsmen according to the flesh; yea more, as was His highly favoured mother

"blessed among women." In His estimation the bonds of faith and holy obedience are the most endearing, as they are the most enduring. The abode of His tenderest and most sacred affection in the family of God, consisting of all those who do the will of His Heavenly Father. He regards and deals with them, as members of the same great and blessed household with Himself. They are called by the same name, "the sons of God," and they breathe the same Spirit of holiness and joy. The same family likeness is stamped upon their hearts, and the same great features mark their outward appearance. They are holy as He is holy. They enjoy the same delightful freedom of fellowship with the Father. They have all things in common, the same love and hatred, the same joys and sorrows, the same friends and foes. They sit at the same table, and are nourished with the same food, and refreshed from the same living fountain. They are watched over by the same fatherly care. They are the objects of the same divine love and sympathy, and the heirs of the same glorious crown and kingdom. How inconceivable the privilege! how honourable the distinction! how unutterable the blessedness of being indeed the brother, sister, or mother of Him, who is God equal with the Father, the Lord of all, the King of Glory!

Think who we are and who He is. We are the basest of rebels. He is the best and holiest of sovereigns. We are miserably poor and destitute. He is infinitely rich and powerful, prosperous and happy. We are to Him what time is to eternity, what the finite is to the infinite, what the dependent is to the independent, what the created is to the uncreated. We are to Him what deformity is to beauty, what pollution is to purity, what hatred is to love, what darkness is to light, what sin is

to God. Yet notwithstanding this absolute contrast and infinite distance, the Son of the Highest is not ashamed to call us, to love us, and to deal with us, in every respect, as His brethren. It was in order that we might stand in this relation to Him, that He came down from heaven, parted with all He had, and laid down His life. O wonderful condescension! Amazing love!

And who are they that are warranted to lay claim to this grand distinction? It is within reach of all the children of men. The most unworthy are welcome to receive it. But it is actually enjoyed, not by those who are joined to the Lord by merely outward, carnal, or hereditary bonds, not by those who are ruled by their own wills, or by habit, custom, or expediency, not by those who merely *know*, but by those that *do* the will of the Father in heaven. "And this is the will of Him that sent me, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him may have everlasting life."

Forty-third.

WILT THOU LAY DOWN THY LIFE FOR MY SAKE?

JOHN xiii. 38.—Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake?

ALL the Evangelists record our Lord's conversation with Peter on that ever memorable night. It is probable that it began before they left the supper-room, and was resumed when they were on their way to the Mount of Olives. It is certain that Jesus gave Peter solemn and repeated, kind and faithful warnings of approaching temptation. "Whither I go," says He, "thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards," Instead of retiring, as Peter supposed, to some remote region, to prepare for setting up a great earthly empire, our Lord was about to suffer and to die, and thus to enter into His glory. In this arduous path, it soon became too manifest, that Peter was by no means ready to follow His master. The time, indeed, was to come, when the apostle was to do so, but it was many long years after this. Very much had Peter to learn, and suffer, and do, before he could carry the cross, or win the crown, of Christian Martyrdom. Meantime, he does not understand the meaning of our Lord's words, and, therefore, he boldly and confidently asks, "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my

life for thy sake." Our Lord showed His disapprobation of this self-confident and presumptuous speech, by making no immediate or direct reply. He was silent. But when they drew near to the Garden of Gethsemane, He returned to the subject, and addressed to all His disciples the words of warning and encouragement. Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night. Events the most sudden and startling are about to take place on this very evening. The words of the ancient oracle are on the eve of accomplishment, "I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered abroad." But the good Master does not leave them in darkness and dismay. He graciously adds these words, than which none could be better fitted to awaken love and confidence in fainting hearts." "But after I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee." Notwithstanding the Lord's marked displeasure, and the intimation, that he was standing on the brink of a precipice, Peter is neither checked nor daunted. His confidence in himself is not shaken in the very least. He repeats the loudest protestations of fidelity. He said unto Him, "Though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Though all my brethren should stumble and fall, halt and hesitate in the hour of trial, I will stand firm." He has no fears with respect to himself. It was probably in reply to this vain-glorious statement, that our Lord spoke the very tender and suggestive words, recorded by Luke. "*Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not, and when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren.*" The repetition of the words "Simon, Simon," and the use of the word "Behold,"

show both how deep was the delusion in which Peter indulged, and how earnestly our Lord sought to awaken him to a sense of his perilous position. The terms, "*Satan hath desired to have you*," imply that the Wicked One not only desired and expressed the desire, to tempt all the Apostles; but also that his desire, to some extent, was granted. He has already in his grasp one of their number, namely Judas, but he burns with fiendish longing, not only to sift and shake, as wheat in a sieve, but also to destroy all the rest. Moreover, it is here intimated, that Satan can do nothing, without the knowledge and permission of Jesus Christ. While he accuses, pleads and plots against the brethren day and night, there is another wiser and mightier than he, who ever lives to make intercession for them in the presence-chamber of God. How touching and tender are these words, "I have prayed for thee." The merciful Jesus here anticipates the time, when he who is now boasting of his strength and constancy will be overwhelmed with spiritual distress and self-reproach, and be ready to abandon all hope. Therefore the Good Master lays up a store of comfort for that dark hour. While he states indirectly that He prays for all His followers, He conveys the blessed assurance, that he who is in special danger is specially remembered. The great Advocate within the veil, not only pleads and provides for His people, as one great community, or as a whole; but He has regard to the peculiar condition and circumstances of every separate individual. He thinks of them one by one: and He asks for that thing which every one most stands in need of. "*I have prayed that thy faith fail not.*" Peter's faith was that which was to be most sorely tried, and most likely to give way, therefore to it Jesus

directed His thoughts. Nor were His prayers in vain. For although there was indeed a very sad and glaring failure on the part of Peter, after all it was partial and not complete, temporary and not lasting. Great was his fall, but not less marked and decided was his rising again. Most grievous was his sin, but very deep and abiding was his penitence. Our Lord not only predicted and provided for his shortcoming and his restoration; but He looked further still. He gave instruction with regard to the practical use to be made of that which was to take place. "*When thou art converted strengthen thy brethren.*" No one can read with attention the story of Peter's subsequent life, and especially his epistles, and fail to see the effects of this injunction. Meantime however all warnings seem to be thrown away. All our Lord's earnestness, loving-kindness, and solemnity seem to produce no impression. Nothing can lead Peter to entertain a doubt with regard to his own steadfastness. Nay, he speaks more proudly and boastfully than before. He is very weak, and yet he thinks himself very strong. His weakest point, is just the part in which he has the greatest confidence. Was he singular in this respect? But let us hear what he says. "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison and to death; I will lay down my life for thy sake." Thou hast chosen me to be thy disciple, and conferred on me the dignity of an apostle. Thou hast endowed me with the power of working miracles. On more than one occasion Thou hast honoured me above my fellows, how then can I be either ungrateful or unfaithful? I will follow Thee come what may. I will walk in thy footsteps however steep or arduous the path. Where is the danger I will not brave? What labours and sufferings will I not undergo for Thy sake?

With Thee I am prepared to live; for thy sake I am ready to die.

Whatever fault may be found with this language, it is impossible to call in question its thorough sincerity. Of this Peter gave conclusive evidence, when at the risk of his life a short time after, he drew his sword and smote those who were laying violent hands on his master. Moreover, considered in itself, Peter's proposal to lay down his life for the sake of Christ, was not only faultless, but praise-worthy. While it is sinful to court martyrdom, we are commanded to hold life at God's pleasure, and to be ready to yield it up, where, when, and how He may be pleased to appoint. "He that loveth his life shall lose it, he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." We are to die, rather than desert or dishonour Jesus Christ. Is life too great a sacrifice to make for Him, who laid down his life for us?

Therefore, when our Lord puts this question to Peter, "Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake?" He does not mean to suggest a doubt with regard either to the sincerity, or to the propriety of his proposal. But what He desires, is to make Peter ashamed of his overweening conceit and self-confidence. His error consisted not in promising too much, but in making promises entirely in reliance upon himself and not upon the help of God. Therefore he is asked, Hast thou counted the cost? Hast thou formed a true estimate of thine own. strength? Has it never failed in times past as when thou didst attempt to walk on the sea? What art thou, a sturdy oak or a broken reed? Thou sayest thou wilt die for me,—art thou able to live for me? Thou pro-

misest thy life; when the hour of trial comes, thou wilt not give me even the words of thy lips.

Though he fell into grievous sin at this time, yet, in the end, Peter laid down his life for Christ's sake. Therefore, though dead, yet he speaketh to us, loudly and solemnly, of the duty of being steadfast and faithful to the Redeemer, at whatever cost, even though it should involve the sacrifice of life itself. Love not your life unto the death. Let the words of the Master be ever ringing in your ears. "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." Reader, He still puts and presses the question, in one form or other.—"Wilt *thou* lay down thy life for my sake?"

Forty-fourth.

WHY HAST THOU NOT A WEDDING GARMENT?

MATT. xxii. 12. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?

IN this parable the glorious gospel is likened to the marriage supper of the only begotten and well-beloved son of the King of Heaven. It is not merely compared to a feast, it is a wedding-feast—nay more, it is the wedding-feast of the King of kings. It is the entertainment provided by the Great God for the perishing souls of men. And its splendour and sumptuousness are in every way worthy of the Possessor of Heaven and earth. The provision made is so abundant, that it is absolutely inexhaustible; it is sufficient and more than sufficient to supply for evermore the wants of all the children of men. There is enough and to spare for the whole world, yea for ten thousand worlds. The variety of this feast is such that it embraces every dainty and every delicacy—every form of created and uncreated good—everything that is needful either to refresh or to strengthen, to enlarge or to ennoble the soul. Here are to be enjoyed the highest honours, the sweetest fellowship and the purest happiness. To partake of this repast, is to ex-

perience that love which is better than wine, that mercy which is sweeter than honey from the honey-comb, and that grace which is more to be desired than thousands of the most fine gold. It is to be brought into nearest and most endearing union and communion with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Could there be a nobler entertainment? Could there be sweeter delights? Blessed be God, this feast is as free as it is full, soul-satisfying and glorious. It is provided entirely at the expense of the King of kings, and He makes the beggar as welcome to it as the prince.

To the Jews were the first invitations given. To them, not once but again and again in Old Testament times, did God send patriarchs and prophets who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost of the feast of fat things. When the fulness of time had come He commissioned other messengers, such as John Baptist, "the twelve," and "the seventy," who preached, saying, the kingdom or Heaven is at hand. After the death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord, and after the day of Pentecost, when all preparations had been made, all provision furnished, all arrangements perfected, when, so to speak, the repast was on the table, and the appointed hour of enjoyment had come, again He sent forth other servants, such as Stephen, with the freer, fuller and more earnest invitation, "Come, for all things are now ready." And what was the response? Alas! so far as the main body of the Jewish nation was concerned, all these loving and urgent efforts were worse than in vain. First of all it is recorded "they would not come." They did not wish to have God for their Father, or Jesus Christ for their Saviour, or the Holy Ghost for their Sanctifier. They had no relish for the glorious

gospel-feast. They were not willing to receive offered mercy and peace, life and joy. But they soon became more than unwilling. The course of sin is ever from bad to worse. The next thing stated with regard to them is, that they made light of the feast and went their ways after other things. At first they were merely careless, now they are contemptuous. Disrelish has become dislike. The farm is chosen rather than the favour of the most High God: the merchandize of earth rather than the pearl of great price: the husks that the swine do eat rather than the dainties of the Father's house. Nor was even this all. In the end, we read, they took the King's servants, entreated them spitefully and slew them. The Jews put to death the messengers God mercifully sent. They became open and cruel persecutors, and now the cup of their iniquity was full. The King was wroth and sent forth his armies—the legions of Rome—the rods of God's vengeance—and destroyed those murderers, and burned to the ground Jerusalem, here significantly called "*their City*," for it had ceased to be the Lord's.

Those who were first bidden to the royal marriage feast having declared themselves unworthy, invitations were immediately issued to others. The King commanded His servants to go forth into all the highways of the world, to bring in men of every rank, condition and character without exception or distinction. So they went out and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. Imagine the scene. Behold the royal banquet-hall with all its grandeur and magnificence; with all its brilliant lights and beautiful melodies; with all its sweet odours and sumptuous viands. All

the guests are assembled. Every heart beats high with the hope of rarest enjoyment; and now the approach of the King—the master of the feast—is announced. The door flies open and He enters. Every one is waiting for the smile of welcome. The approving eye of the host beams upon guest after guest, until it falls upon one who is not clothed with apparel befitting the occasion, and such as it was customary to wear. In a moment the brightest smile is changed into the blackest frown. Every eye is fastened upon the daring intruder, and on his ragged and filthy garments. The face of brass is covered with shame and confusion. The wretched man is ready to sink beneath the earth. Then were uttered the startling and cutting words, "Friend—traitor, hypocrite—how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless." He had not one word to say for himself. His mouth was stopped, was gagged: and the awful words of doom were pronounced, "The King said to the servants. Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Why was so severe a sentence pronounced against a man unexpectedly summoned from the highway to a royal banquet, and who had neither time nor means to obtain suitable attire? Let it be remembered it was the custom of eastern princes to present festival garments along with their invitations. Kitto tells us that every one invited to a royal banquet received a robe of honour from the king. Without this it was unlawful to enter the monarch's presence, or sit at his table. To refuse, or to neglect to put on the dress given, was regarded as the greatest possible insult, and treated accordingly.

The words of our question bring before our minds the last judgment, when the secrets of every heart will be made manifest, and the condition of every one will be decided by Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire. It will then be seen that all are not Israel that are called Israel, and that some who come to the gospel-feast as God's people come, and who sit as they sit, shall be driven away into outer darkness. And we are here taught that on that great and awful day, the question which will determine for weal or woe, the destiny of every person will be this, have I or have I not a wedding garment to clothe my soul? This is the thing which distinguishes the true Christian from the false. Therefore the all-important inquiry presents itself: what covers all my sins and makes me well pleasing in the sight of the holy, heart-searching God? What spiritual attire is necessary for true fellowship with Christ on earth and in Heaven? Is it raiment won or woven by myself? This parable solemnly affirms that to trust to this is ruin. This man was cast into outer darkness just because he thought his own garment good enough. There is no truth so fully, so frequently, so formally asserted and proved in Scripture as this, by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God. We never read that we are accepted because of anything done by us, or wrought in us. We are always taught that we are justified solely and entirely by what Christ has done and endured for us. "*We are justified through the redemption that is in Him;*" "*justified by His blood;*" "*justified by His obedience;*" "*justified by Him from all things.*" "He is made righteousness unto us," He is "Jehovah our Righteousness." Therefore the wedding-garment is the law-magnifying, justice-satisfying, soul-

saving, God-glorifying righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone. This is the "goodly raiment" of our Elder brother which secures the blessing of our Heavenly Father. This is the "best robe" which every returning prodigal receives. This is the "fine linen clean and white" in which the bride of the Lamb is arrayed. At infinite cost this righteousness has been wrought out in our nature, in our name, and in our behalf by the Son and Equal of God: the whole word of God declares that it is all sufficient and alone sufficient to secure for us the pardon of sin, peace of mind, and a title to eternal life: it is moreover invariably offered to all of us as a free gift; we have every possible warrant and encouragement to make it our own. It is impossible to plead ignorance, inability or any other excuse as a reason for not accepting it. If therefore we reject it we are guilty of the basest ingratitude, and the most daring presumption: and we shall be condemned by our own consciences, and punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power.

Let me beware of self-righteousness. Let me ever say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength, I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, and my soul shall be joyful in my God, for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

Forty-fifth.

AM I ABLE TO DO THIS?

MATT. ix. 28.—Believe ye that I am able to do this?

As the sun in the heavens never rests, but is ever pursuing his path, and pouring down light and life, beauty and joy, so Jesus Christ, the Sun of righteousness, was ever about His Father's business, unceasingly doing good, bestowing blessings, and diffusing health and happiness. Of the many proofs of this fact that might be brought forward, none can be more striking than that which is furnished by the events of the glorious day at the close of which this question was put. Immediately after the cure of the demoniac of Gadara, we have the call of Levi or Matthew. The new convert gave proof of his gratitude by making a great feast, to which he invited Jesus and His disciples, together with a large company of publicans and others. When reclining at table, our Lord delivered a discourse concerning fasting. Before He had done speaking, Jairus came and besought Him to visit his little daughter who was lying at the point of death. Jesus immediately rose from the table and went with him. When He was walking along to his house, He healed the woman with an issue of blood. After this He went forward and restored to life the damsel. On His return, He was accosted by two blind men,

who followed, crying and saying:—"Thou Son of David, have mercy on us." Having come, soon afterwards, into the house where He was, Jesus asked them, "Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto Him, yea, Lord. Then touched He their eyes, saying, according to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened." These facts speak for themselves. One deliverance follows another most rapidly. Whether sitting in the house, or walking by the way, the Son of man is most busily performing wonderful acts of love and power.

Mark the terms of our question. Jesus does not ask these men to what rank or station of life they belonged; or whether they have the means to repay Him for their cure. He does not ask what claims they have upon His aid. He does not ask them if they had brought this great calamity upon themselves. He asks no such questions, He raises no difficulties, He shows no hesitation whatever. He simply inquires: "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" This is the great the only prerequisite, Have ye faith in my power? Have you confidence in my ability to open your eyes? are you convinced in your heart, that I can of myself do for you that which you cannot do for yourselves, and which no creature in the universe can accomplish for you? Are you prepared unhesitatingly and unreservedly to put your case into my hands? I do not ask whether your faith is weak or strong, but whether you have any real child-like reliance to put in me. The question is evidently intended to show the infinite importance and absolute necessity of faith in the power of Jesus Christ.

When our Lord opened the eyes of these and other blind men He intended to convince them and us of His ability to confer a blessing of a higher order than natu-

ral sight, even to enlighten our blinded understandings and to translate our souls from darkness into marvellous light. In our natural condition we are spiritually blind. We are in darkness, and know not whither we go. We love the darkness rather than the light, because our deeds are evil. We are blind with regard to the true nature of things; we put good for evil and evil for good, sweet for bitter and bitter for sweet. We are blind with respect to this world, we live as if it were our all; we do not realize how hollow, and fleeting, and unsatisfying are all its pleasures. We are blind and insensible to our own spiritual condition, we do not know ourselves, our weaknesses and wants, above all our guilt, depravity, and danger. We are blind to the true nature of the things of God, we see no beauty in holiness, no grandeur in redemption, no glory in Christ, no goodness in our heavenly Father. To the sin-blinded understanding, all these infinitely glorious realities are nothing more, than are the most brilliant colours, the most beautiful forms, and the most dazzling light, to him who never saw the sun. They possess no heart-affecting power or splendour, preciousness or attractiveness. Such is the testimony of the word of God,"Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart." Eph. iv. 18. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not." 2 Cor. iv. 4. How dreadful is this condition! The gospel of the grace of God is hid from us; we are lost. How doth it become all whose hearts are unenlightened by the Spirit of God to cry, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David, Lord that our eyes may be opened?—Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold

wondrous things out of thy law." Blessed be His great and good name, Jesus came into this world to open the eyes of the blind. We have the same access to Him that these two blind men had in the days of His flesh. He is not changed. He is still the same in heart. He is still the most willing and compassionate Redeemer. He puts no questions with regard to the past. He does not inquire whether our blindness is partial or total—whether it has descended to us from our parents, or whether we have brought it upon ourselves. He asks only, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?"

O my soul, realize that there is no limit to the ability of thy Saviour. Who can tell the exceeding greatness of the power of my divine Redeemer? O Jesus Christ, Thou art God equal with the Father. Thou art Almighty. Thou art able to do exceeding abundantly above all I can either ask or think. Thou rulest the raging of the sea. The winds and the waves, the thunder and the lightning, the earthquake and the storm obey thy voice. At thy bidding Satan falls like lightning from heaven, the lame walk, the dumb speak, the deaf hear, the blind see, the diseased are restored to health, the dead rise from the tomb. Thou didst lay the foundations of the earth, the heavens also are the work of thy hand. Is anything too hard for thee? High is thy hand, strong is thine arm.

Which of my enemies art thou not able to subdue? Where is the want thou art not able to supply? the wound thou art not able to heal? the fear thou art not able to quell? the storm thou art not able to allay? Listen to Jesus as He questions thee. Believe ye that I am able to take away sin, to conquer death, to subdue Satan? Believe ye, O sinner, that I am able to save?

that my power, grace, and righteousness are infinite? Believe ye that I am able to relieve your misery, be it ever so great, and your deserts ever so little, your strength ever so weak? Believe ye that I am able to sustain and support you in the midst of all your afflictions and distresses, all your temptations and trials, all your corruptions and declensions? Believe ye that I am able to fulfil all my promises? Believe ye that I am able to turn sorrow into joy, darkness into light, death into life, blindness into sight.

Let me meditate day and night upon the infinite power and boundless resources of Jesus Christ. Let me lean no longer on an arm of flesh. Let me imitate the example of these men. How earnest they are! "They cry aloud." How humble they are? They make no claim of right. They cast themselves entirely upon the "mercy" of the Son of David. How persevering they are! They are not discouraged by delay. They follow Jesus from place to place, they take no rest, they give Him no rest until the desire of their hearts is granted. How strong is their faith! They had no previous case to fall back upon. Up to this time Jesus had never opened the eyes of the blind. But it was predicted that the Son of David should do so, and on this they rely. Did they pray so humbly, earnestly, believingly, and perseveringly for the opening of their bodily eyes? How then should I plead for the enlightenment of my immortal soul?

Forty-sixth.

WHO WILL LOVE MOST?

LUKE vii. 42.—Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most.

JESUS is at the dinner-table of Simon the Pharisee. According to the eastern custom, He is reclining on a couch, His feet being turned outwards. A woman, whose name is delicately withheld, enters the guest chamber. What brings such an one here, and at such a time? What has induced a "sinner" to cross the threshold of a "pharisee"? Does she expect to receive a welcome? Is she not courting scorn rather than sympathy? She seeks Jesus. What does she desire of Him? Is it the cure of some bodily disease? the removal of some earthly and outward evil? Many came to Him for such things, and few for aught else. This is not her errand. What then does she want? Let her attitude and actions answer the question. She is one of those who speak by deeds rather than by words. Observe her countenance, her eyes, her lips, her hair, her hands. What do you see? Her face is no longer bold and brazen, but covered "with shame for all the abominations she hath done." She can find no words to express her sense of vileness. She dare not confront the pure and holy Jesus. She dare not come before

Him, and yet she cannot keep at a distance. Shrinkingly and silently she stands at His feet—"*behind weeping.*" She has heard and believed those touching words recently uttered; "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Hence the heart of stone has become an heart of flesh. She was a sinner: she is a saint. She has been forgiven much, therefore she loves much, so much that words cannot express it; and yet, expression it must have, and that immediately. And so she comes not empty handed. She brought an alabaster box of ointment to anoint the feet, not the head, of Jesus, for that she would think presumption. It is the most pleasant and precious thing in her possession, and were it a thousand times better, Jesus shall have it. Nothing can be too costly, or too fragrant for Him. This ointment, though she knows it not, He will prize more highly than "*ten thousand rivers of oil.*" She bathes those feet, which have brought her such joyful tidings, with floods of tears. And then, as if she had polluted them, she wipes them with the long tresses of her hair. Nor was this enough. Again and again she stooped down and kissed and caressed them. Thus her gratitude shows itself in every possible way: by her eyes, by her lips, by her hair, by her hands. All the instruments of sin become the servants of righteousness. Though she stood behind Him this did not prevent Jesus from marking most distinctly and delightfully all these proofs of faith, love, repentance, humility, and devotion. The feelings awakened in the bosom of the Pharisee, by this touching sight, were altogether different. Neither understanding

nor rejoicing in these affecting tokens of penitence, he can think only of her former character. To him she is just what she was—a sinner. Her touch is pollution; the sight of her is an eye-sore. He would drive her from his presence. Taking it for granted that our Lord does not and cannot know her history, he begins to say in his heart, this man is not a prophet after all. He is about to be taught that He is more than a prophet.

That eye that searches every spirit, saw at one glance all that was passing in the mind of this man. But mark the courtesy, wisdom, and love of the Son of God. Instead of at once bluntly reproving him for his fault, and thus wounding his pride and stirring up his resentment, our Lord deals with him after the manner of Nathan of old, and with the same result. He spake a parable unto him, and led him to pass sentence upon himself. "Jesus said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. There was a certain creditor had two debtors, the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty: and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most. Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most; and He said unto him, thou hast judged rightly." The creditor is God. The debtors are the Pharisee and this woman. The debt is sin. Stripped of all disguise, the question is, Whether dost thou or this woman love me most? Unknown to himself, Simon decides for the woman, and against himself. No other decision, indeed, could be given. The deepest penitent is the most devoted Christian.

These words raise and we think settle a most momentous question. What is the relation between love

of God and pardon of sin? Was this woman forgiven because she loved? Or did she love because she was forgiven? Which is the cause? Which the effect? Can I love God before I am forgiven of God? I trow not. My creditor is stern and unrelenting. He threatens to sell my wife and children, and all that I have, and to cast me into prison. I am drowned in debt. Night and day I am labouring to pay it off. Notwithstanding all I can do, I find that instead of making progress towards payment, my debt is actually growing larger. Yet I toil on and on. Who will call this a labour of love? On the contrary is it not irksome, toilsome and slavish in the extreme? My mind is full of fear, distrust and hatred. But let me believe in the present, free, and full forgiveness of God. Let me feel in my heart that He is infinitely ready to pardon all my sins. Let me realize that as the heavens are higher than the earth, so great is His mercy; and by the grace and spirit of God, love springs up in my heart.

Listen to the testimony of the Son of God. While He makes allowance for the amount and degree of sin, while He regards one person as tenfold more guilty than another, he asserts that all are in debt; all are under the law at first; all are utterly unable to pay, or make atonement for sin, and therefore all alike must be freely forgiven, if they are forgiven at all. If this woman bought her pardon by her precious ointment, her kisses and her tears; how could it be said with truth, she had nothing to pay? How could it be affirmed she was freely forgiven? Why did our Lord say, "thy faith," not thy works, *hath saved thee?* On this supposition how could we explain the statement, "To whom little is forgiven the same loveth little."

In this question it is plainly implied that love does not arise in the heart before, but on the contrary, after, forgiveness has been granted. It is not asked which of them *loved*; but it is, tell me, therefore, which of them *will love* him most? If the love of God cannot exist in man's heart previous to, how can it merit, the pardon of sin? If love is the effect of felt forgiveness, the objection founded on the statement, "her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much" is without force. Moreover, it should be observed that the word "for," does not always mean *because*. The expression must be viewed in the light of the whole parable. Its obvious import is, her conduct towards me manifests that love which is a proof and evidence that her sins are forgiven.

Having heard the answer of His host, Jesus was not slow to unfold its meaning, and to turn it to practical account. Simon, behold this woman. Mark her behaviour towards me, and compare it with your own. In compliance with thine own invitation I became thy guest, yet, contrary to ordinary courtesy, thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she, whose guest I am not, hath washed them, and that too with tears, and hath wiped them, not with a towel, but with the very hairs of her head. Thou didst not salute me, as men are wont to do, with a kiss on the cheek, but since I came in she hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head thou didst not anoint even with common oil, but this woman hath poured upon my feet ointment very precious.

Faith in the free forgiveness of sin, through Jesus Christ, is the fountain of love, and the mainspring of obedience. Without it I am incapable of serving God. All my prayers, purposes, services and sacrifices are the acts of an enemy. I live in fear and bondage. My

religion is a burden and a drudgery. Without this faith I am a stranger to liberty of spirit. Let me ask myself, do I really believe in the free and full forgiveness of all my sins? Have I seen and felt pardon flowing to me from the heart of God, through the blood of Jesus Christ? Do I prize it above all price. Is it the joy of my heart? Does it powerfully constrain me to lead a holy life?

Forty-seventh.

WHO TOUCHED ME?

LUKE viii. 45.—Jesus said, Who touched me?

OUR Lord is on His way to the house of Jairus, whose only daughter, a child about twelve years of age, is lying at the point of death. As He went along, "much people followed Him and thronged Him." In the crowd one object specially attracts our attention. It is a poor woman. Her thread-bare garments tell of poverty and "better days." Her sad and emaciated countenance bears the deep traces of painful and long-continued suffering. But for the unwonted fire that burns in her eye, one would say she is the very picture of despair. She is indeed a daughter of affliction. During twelve long years she has been labouring under a distressing malady. All kinds of means and medicines have been tried. She has suffered many things of many physicians. Many a bitter draught has she drunk, many a trying experiment has she made. She has spent her earthly all in the pursuit of health, and all has been in vain, yea, worse than in vain, for now she is not only incurably diseased, but also absolutely destitute. It is the time of her extremity, and therefore of God's opportunity.

Jesus is her forlorn hope. She has heard of the wonderful cures He has performed, and although she has been oftentimes disappointed in others, she has great

faith in Him. She does not entertain any doubt of His ability to heal her. "She said within herself, if I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole." She goes where Christ is to be met with, and she seizes the opportunity when He is surrounded by the crowd. Timidly, almost stealthily, fearing and trembling every moment lest she should be discovered and put to shame, yet withal most earnestly and resolutely, she approaches the Saviour. "She came in the press behind Jesus." Too modest and humble to lay hold on Him with a grasp, she can venture only to touch, and that, too, His garment and not His person, nay, it is only the hem of His garment. It was enough. The effect was most marvellous. Not gradually, but in a moment, the disease of twelve years' standing, which has baffled all the skill of all the physicians of the country, is healed. "Immediately she felt in her body that she had been healed of that plague." And Jesus immediately knowing in Himself that virtue had gone out of Him, turned Him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? "Master," say the disciples, "the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? Rather ask, who touched thee not? But Jesus repeats the question; and why? Are we to suppose that He was ignorant of this woman and of all that she had felt and done. The question He asks is proof that the most secret thing is known to Him. Already, as this woman knows, His eyes are fixed upon her.

Does He sternly put this question that He might rebuke her presumption in drawing near to Him? Or is it because He grudges the virtue that has gone out of Him? On the contrary, He speaks to her in the tenderest accents. The presumption He ever complains

of is not that of those who draw near to Him, but that of those who turn away from Him—the heaven-sent physician. Nothing afforded Him greater delight than to heal and bless all who came unto Him, no matter how or when they came.

Why, then, it is again asked, did He institute this inquiry? In the first place, it was for the good of her whom He had healed that she should be interrogated. Although her faith was wonderfully strong, it was not unmingled with error and superstition. She may or may not have attached a magical virtue to the hem of our Lord's garment. She probably thought that He would regard her touch as pollution. It seems certain she believed that she might obtain relief without His knowledge or consent. Jesus loves her too well to allow her to depart from His presence under the influence of such delusions. He desires to instruct her more fully. He longs to seal her faith and ratify her cure. He would prevent the possibility of future misunderstandings and self-reproach.

This question was also asked for our benefit. It was "*within herself*" that she said, if I may touch but His clothes I shall be whole. It was "*within herself*," also, that she felt she had been healed of that plague. And if this inquiry had not been made we might never have known, either how desperate was her disease, or how marvellous her cure. One of the most striking and encouraging examples of faith on record would thus have been lost.

Moreover, our Lord put this question for His own name's sake, in order that His true character might be properly understood, and His power and love magnified. He desires to make it known to all the world that He

is the deliverer of those that are beyond human hope and help.

Observe what Jesus owns, acknowledges, and blesses. He takes no notice of the thronging and jostling of the miscellaneous multitude. He recognises only the touch of one trembling hand. He does not value material pressure or bodily contact, or mere outward nearness of any kind whatever. It is spiritual contact ; the touch of faith ; the deliberate, trustful forthgoing of the soul to the Saviour, that secures His blessing and healing virtue. The most regular and unremitting attendance upon the institutions of Christian worship, the strictest observance of rites and ceremonies, the most consistent Christian profession, the most painful penances, the costliest sacrifices, the most abundant liberality, and the most ardent zeal, will be of no avail, if we do not draw near to Jesus with believing hearts. "*That is only done which the soul doeth.*" He who does not touch Jesus with the hand of faith does not touch Him at all. He is an entire stranger to His healing virtue. He has neither part nor lot with Him. That crowd contained a vast multitude of immortal creatures, many of them were as near, some of them were nearer, to the person of Jesus than this woman. But she alone derived benefit, for she alone put forth the hand of faith. And so it ever is.

The case of this woman suggests an important lesson to those who have been earnestly seeking, but who have never found spiritual health. Although you have waited for years, and tried many plans without deriving any benefit, as long as you have the Saviour to go to, do not despair, do not abandon the pursuit. Perhaps your many disappointments have arisen from this, that instead

of repairing directly and always to Christ, you have been running after many physicians. Be assured, Jesus will make you welcome, even although you have spent your all upon others, and only come to Him when you can do no better.

We are here taught that religion should be something more than a secret thing between ourselves and God. To a large extent it ought to consist of private communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and of those acts of faith and patience, love and joy, which no human eye can see. Everything that most distantly approaches to ostentation is alien to its spirit. Holy Scripture declares when we pray we are to enter into our closets and to shut the door. When we fast we are not to appear to men to fast. When we give alms, the left hand is not to know what the right hand doeth. Nevertheless, religion has its public as well as its private duties. The confession of Christ before men is declared in the Word of God to be essential to salvation. "Whosoever," said our Lord, "shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven," Matt. x. 32, 33. Again, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels," Mark viii. 38. "If we suffer we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us," 2 Tim. ii. 12. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteous-

ness, but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation," Rom. x. 9, 10. There is no condition of Christian discipleship more plainly laid down in Scripture. Why should any declaration on this subject be necessary? Does any loyal subject require to be exhorted to acknowledge publicly his beloved sovereign? Does any loving child need to be told to own openly his father or mother? Can a man be a subject of the kingdom of heaven, and yet habitually refuse to do open homage to Him who is its only King and Head, Lawgiver and Lord? "Ye are the salt of the earth. Ye are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven," Matt. v. 13, 14, 16.

Forty-eighth.

WHOM DO MEN SAY I AM?

MATT. xvi. 13.—When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?

OUR Lord is on the eve of constituting His followers into a distinct organization; therefore, as usual on great occasions, He desires to be alone with God. He leads His disciples away to the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, to a quiet solitude beyond the boundary line of the doomed country, and there formally lays the foundation-stone of the New Testament Church. But before this can be done, some facts must be established, and some confessions of faith must be made. Consequently, some important questions must be put. He turns to the twelve apostles, and asks, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" Observe, He does not designate Himself the Son of David, or the Son of God, but the Son of man; He adopts here, as on nearly seventy other occasions, not the highest but the humblest title which belongs to Him. He delights to employ, not the coldest, but the kindest; not the most distant, but the most endearing; not the narrowest and most exclusive, but the broadest, the most generous and comprehensive appellation. He identifies Himself with

"*the man*," "*the Son of man*," of ancient promise and prophecy. He presents to our view, the human, the most inviting and accessible aspect of His many-sided character. He announces His compassion towards all the brotherhood of mankind, all the thousands and millions of immortal beings lying in bondage and darkness. Hence the terms of His preliminary inquiry, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" What opinions are held by men, in general, concerning me? What do they say of my character and claims? Do they know who I am? whence I came? and what is the work given me to do.

Notice, He does not inquire, what were the opinions of the scribes and Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians. Their minds were under the influence of strong personal and traditionary prejudices. Their views were well-known and worthless in moral value. He asks, rather, what were the beliefs of the general community of the Jewish nation, among whom He had so long lived and laboured, who had listened to His doctrines, witnessed His miracles, and studied His manner of life. What, then, are the fruits and results of His marvellous ministry? Let the testimony of these competent witnesses be received. Some say that thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, others Jeremias or one of the prophets. The disciples might have given much more unfavourable answers. Some say, He is a gluttonous man, and a friend of publicans and sinners. This man is a sinner, He blasphemeth, He deceiveth the people, He hath a devil and is mad. But even the answers they report are unworthy enough. What a miserable state of matters! Here is a community which enjoys, and has long enjoyed, the highest training and advantages, utterly unable to give

a verdict on the most vital of all subjects. Did they not deserve to be doomed? Was it not high time that the kingdom of God should be taken from them, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof? Notwithstanding all the preparations that had been made; all the messengers that had been sent; all the symbols, promises, and prophecies of their Scriptures; and all the sayings and doings of Jesus Christ; there is nothing to be found among them but vagueness and uncertainty, speculation and tradition. The only point with regard to which they are agreed, is that the Christ is not the Christ, but some one else. This fact is sufficient to prove that the Jewish Church was incompetent and unfit to occupy the position it had so long held, and that it was necessary to supersede and set it aside, as the witness of the truth of God. There can be no doubt the question before us was intended to bring out these circumstances, and thus to prepare the minds of the disciples for what was to follow. Hitherto, they have been only learners, sitting at the feet of Jesus, now they are to become teachers, ministers and apostles. They are about to be sent forth to preach the gospel, first to the Jew and then to the Gentiles; and, in order to this, it is essentially necessary that they should contemplate the condition in which men everywhere are living and dying; and, especially, that they should realize their ignorance and indecision with regard to the only Saviour of sinners.

This question invites us, not less than the apostles, to consider what is the spiritual condition of our fellow-men. In this age of boasted intelligence and progress, what do men say with regard to the Lord Jesus Christ? More than eighteen hundred years have passed away

since the command was issued, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." How painful and humiliating the thought, that there are hundreds of millions of immortal beings who have never yet heard of the only name under heaven, given among men, whereby they can be saved. "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into His harvest."

But to speak of Christendom so-called, What do these baptized ones say of the Son of man? What is the language of their lips and of their lives? Are there not multitudes of all ages, classes, and conditions who have no settled opinion, no heart-felt conviction, with respect to Jesus Christ? They have not a little to say about commerce, politics, business, pleasure, or, it may be, science and art, literature and philosophy. On these subjects they have made up their minds, and are not slow to speak. But alas, with respect to that theme, avowedly the greatest that can occupy the thoughts of man, they have no deliberate views, they have nothing to say.

How great the diversity and conflict of opinion regarding Jesus Christ among those who profess to think of Him! He is, "a myth, an abstraction, an emanation, a Jewish Rabbi, a reformer, the founder of a new religion, a philosopher, the model man, the representative man, the second head of humanity."

Ask the Romanist what he has to say of the Son of man. "He is the Son of Mary, one so lofty and exalted, that the sinner can have no direct access to His person, and yet one so imperfect that His sacrifice requires to be constantly repeated and added to by the

sacrifices of men, and that His Intercession needs to be supplemented by that of saints and angels." Ask the ungodly Protestant what he has to say of the Christ. The answer of his life is that Jesus is the minister of sin, the patron of wickedness; that He came into the world to deliver men from the duties they owe to God and to one another. There is no end to the errors, theoretical and practical, in which men indulge with regard to Jesus Christ. The ignorant, the indifferent, the worldly-minded, the self-righteous, the superstitious, the sentimental, the self-indulgent, have each a different thing to say of the Son of man. What is the cause of all this distressing difference of belief with regard to Christ? Whence arise all these errors and divisions? This is the solution, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can He know them, for they are spiritually discerned." The main source of all false opinions about Christ and about Christianity, is that men, instead of humbly and patiently submitting their understandings and consciences to the teaching of the Word and the Spirit of God, either choose their own reason as their guide, walk in the light of their own fire, and in the sparks of their own kindling, or they regulate their beliefs according to the thoughts and traditions of their fallen fellow-creatures. The only question which the honest inquirer has to decide is not what saith reason or what say men, but what saith God in the book of Revelation concerning His Son.

Forty-ninth.

WHOM DO YE SAY I AM?

MATTHEW xvi. 15.—He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

YOU have told me, says our Lord to His disciples, what others say of me. I have now to deal with yourselves. Amidst all this conflict of opinion, what have you yourselves got to say of me? What are your own convictions and beliefs? The sentiments of others are no rule to you. You have not to answer for their errors. Their creed, however orthodox, will not suffice for you. You have enjoyed advantages vastly greater than your fellow-country-men. You have been long time with me. You have seen everything I have done. You have heard every word I have spoken from first to last. You have observed me in public and private. You have been brought into closest contact and converse with me. The grand question you have now to settle, each one for himself, is, what is the conclusion you have come to? what is the result and fruit of your manifold and glorious privileges? You have to answer to God for all these things on the great day of account. What then is the verdict of your conscience and of your heart? It is all too evident that, on every hand, thousands and tens of thousands are perishing for lack of saving knowledge. They know not who I am, or whence, or why I came into

this world. But how is it with you whom I have specially chosen, called and instructed? What am I to you? "Whom say ye that I am?" Speaking as the organ and mouthpiece of the other disciples, Simon Peter firmly replies, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

How hearty and distinct is this utterance! This is the first "Confession of Faith,"—this is the true Apostles' Creed. It expresses belief in the Deity and Messiahship of Jesus Christ, which are the great central truths of the Christian System. "These are the prime and essential articles of catholic verity, upon which rest all sound theology and all saving faith." In this short but illustrious statement, says a great theologian, you have the whole truth with respect to the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

1. It is plainly implied that Jesus Christ possesses human nature, a true body and a reasonable soul. He puts the question as the son of Man. He was a real man. He had flesh and blood as we have. He was born, grew, was liable to hunger and thirst, heat and cold, pain and fatigue, and was subject to death, like ourselves. His mind was constituted like any other human spirit, sin only being excepted. It was endowed with reason, conscience, with affections, emotions, and appetites. It expanded and developed in strength, capacity and attainment, in the ordinary way. He was the man, in every respect, according to God's own heart. He was entire and perfect in all His parts and powers; in no respect defective, excessive, or disproportionate. He was indeed the model man, the predicted man, the noblest, the wisest, the purest, the gentlest, of all the human family. "Thou art all fair, my love, there is no

spot in thee." Possessed of purest human nature, He sympathizes with every kind and degree of human sorrow and suffering. Possessed of immaculate human nature, He exhibits the most beautiful and perfect pattern and example of all kinds of human excellence, of benevolence, charity, patience, humility, tenderness, forbearance, self-sacrifice, and devotedness. Possessed of sinless human nature, He could make expiation for human guilt,—He was capable of dying.

2. The confession of Peter asserts the divinity as well as the humanity of our Lord. He calls Him the "Son of the living God." This expression denotes divine nature. According to the usage of Scripture, God is His Father in such a way, that the Son is of the same essence or substance; possesses the same perfections, receives the same names and titles, does the same supernatural works, and is entitled to the same obedience and worship. He is set forth as a divine person in the Old Testament. He manifested Himself in this character in the days of His flesh. He delivered instructions in His own name. He performed miracles by His own power. He claimed the homage due to Jehovah alone; and to all this God the Father set His seal, when He proclaimed by a voice from Heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased:" and when He raised Him from the dead on the third day. He who was born in Bethlehem, lived in Judea, and died on Calvary, was God equal with the Father. Had He been less than divine, He could not have been the Saviour of my soul. How could any other person than God span the vast distance between the guilty creature and the Holy Creator? and so lay His hands on offender and offended, as to make peace? How could the death of a mere man atone for the sins

of the whole world? How could the righteousness of a mere creature—who is himself bound, always and to the utmost, to obey God—secure the salvation of the very chief of sinners? How could one that has not life in himself, or life of his own, lay down his life for others? These things are utterly impossible. The Saviour I need, must be divine, infinite, all-powerful, all-wise, all-merciful and everywhere present: otherwise he cannot save me.

3. The confession of Peter asserts the truth with regard to the office or work as well as the person of the Son of God. He declares that He is the Christ, that is, the Messiah, the Anointed, the Mediator, He is chosen, appointed, approved and qualified of Jehovah;—and for what end? It is to save sinners. This is the great work given Him to do. For this purpose He came into this world, was born, obeyed the law of God, preached, prayed, went about doing good, died, rose again, and went up into Heaven to make intercession. With this design, He revealed the character and will of God, bare our sins in His own body on the tree, and now reigns in and over all. He is the only, the all-sufficient, Saviour of Sinners. Without Him no human being can obtain eternal life. He is the only Mediator between God and man; through Him alone can God be known and served; though Him alone can man be pardoned and glorified. He alone delivers from sin, Satan, the world, death, and Hell. He alone secures for us peace and joy, strength and consolation. He begins, carries on, and consummates the whole work of salvation. Whatever is done He is the doer of it, either directly or indirectly. To Him alone belongs all the glory. Without Him, apart from Him, not one step can be taken; not one temptation

can be resisted; not one trial can be borne; not one duty can be performed; not one prayer heard.

Reader, believest thou these things? Is this thy heart-felt creed and confession? However much true Christians may differ with regard to other matters, they are all substantially agreed with respect to the things embraced in the confession of Peter. They all believe that Jesus Christ is a divine person,—God equal with the Father. They all hold that He made atonement for sin. There is not one of them who does not renounce every other ground of confidence, every other foundation of righteousness; and who does not hope and trust in Him alone for salvation. Reader, how is it with thyself? What is the Christ to thee? Dost thou honour and obey him as very God? Dost thou heartily receive all His instructions as the great Teacher sent by God? Dost thou build all thy hopes of acceptance in the sight of the Holy God, upon what Jesus Christ has done and suffered? Dost thou count all things loss, that thou mayest win Christ and be found in Him?

Does some reader say, I cannot make these words my own: I really do not know what to think of the Son of man; I am quite at a loss; I am so beset with doubts and with darkness that do what I may I can find no rest to my soul; I am striving hard; but seemingly in vain? Is this indeed the truth? Then be not disheartened. It is of God that you have any care about this matter. Pray for His wisdom and He will give you liberally and upbraid you not. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord; His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." Hos. vi. 3.

Fiftieth.

DO YE STONE ME?

JOHN x. 32. Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?

OUR Lord has just declared, "I and my Father are one." The Jews rightly regarded this statement as an assertion of essential equality with God. And as they considered the speaker to be nothing more than a mere man, they thought Him guilty of blasphemy, and so "took up stones again to stone Him." Calmly confronting them, He asked this question, "Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?" Do ye thus requite the Lord? What iniquity have ye found in me? O my people, what have I done unto thee and wherein have I wearied thee, testify against me, what evil have I done? He pointedly appeals to their conscience to awaken them to a sense of their base ingratitude. He asks them to contrast the benefits He had conferred upon them with their behaviour towards Him. He refers specially to the signs, wonders, and mighty works performed in their midst. Observe what He affirms with regard to His miracles.

1. In the first place, they were "*many*" in number. They were far more numerous than one at first sight might be disposed to believe. Though in the gospel

histories we have details with regard to few more than thirty miracles, it is certain there were many more. Our Lord went about continually doing good. The diseased were brought to Him at all times and wherever He went. John states at the end of his Gospel, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." Though this is evidently the language of hyperbole, it warrants the belief that the number of miracles performed was very great. Those which are recorded are most varied in their character and circumstances. They embrace in their range the earth, the air, and the sea, all kinds of bodily and mental disease, all states of human history and experience, the land of the living and the abode of the dead. If Christ could perform such mighty works as these, we are fully warranted to believe that there is no limit either to the kind or to the number of miracles He was able to accomplish.

2. The second thing stated with respect to His *works* is that they were "*good*," beautiful, and beneficent. As the name implies, the miracles of our Lord were great and mighty, sublime and stupendous. But it is remarkable no notice is here taken of this fact. While we wonder at their magnitude, let us mark above all their excellence. Blessed be the name of Jesus, His works are not only very great but also very good, in every way worthy of Himself, and in beautiful keeping with the errand on which He came into this world. They were good in every respect. They were good in their origin. They sprang from the purest principles, even from strongest love to God and from tenderest mercy to man. They were good in regard to the way and manner in

which they were done. They were wrought without pomp or parade, by the utterance, generally, of a mere word, and, as has been often shown, they were never performed until the mind of the recipient was suitably prepared. With two exceptions, which are apparent and not real, all the miracles of our Saviour were in themselves good, merciful, and engaging. It might have been otherwise. Had our Lord dealt with the Jews as they deserved, instead of appearing in the midst of them arrayed with light as with a garment, He would have been clothed with blackness and darkness, smoke and tempest; instead of healing all manner of sickness and disease, He would have smitten them with plague and pestilence, and violent death; instead of feeding famishing thousands, He would have called for famine on the land and broken the staff of bread; instead of showering down blessings, He would have scattered curses all along the path He trod; instead of casting out demons, He would have delivered all of them over to the devil. We know what was His manner of life. His every day work was to heal and to bless, to preach glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captive, to comfort the mourner, to bind up the broken-hearted. Wherever He came there came joy and hope, happiness and health. Before the light of His countenance disease departed, pain passed away, fear fled, sorrow ceased, death itself died. He restored the sick and the lame to soundness, and the leper to purity and to privilege. He made the demoniac sit at His feet clothed and in his right mind. He gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. He caused the dumb to sing. From the bed of death, from the funeral bier, from the grave of corruption He brought back the departed to the embrace of weeping friends, and the tears

of grief were turned into tears of joy. He was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, "when the eye saw Him it gave witness unto Him, when the ear heard Him it blessed Him, for He delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless, and Him that had none to help. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon Him, and He caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." The works of Jesus were not only good in themselves, they were also good in the ends which they were designed to accomplish. They had a direct bearing upon that great spiritual enterprise, for the sake of which the Son of God came into this world. It did not content Him to deliver the bodies of men from weakness and suffering, and to leave their minds destitute and diseased. No, His aim ever was to engraft the higher upon the lower, to rise from the temporal to the spiritual, in other words, to save the soul.

3. Another feature of "*the works*" of Jesus is indicated in the word "*shewed*," which means manifested or presented openly and publicly to view. Though the miracles were performed without pomp or parade, yet they were not done in secret or in a corner. On the contrary, they were wrought in the light of day, before all the world. They were done "in all Galilee and throughout all Judea," in places of public resort, in the presence of multitudes of enemies as well as of friends. They were open to public inspection. All the details of time, place, and person were known. No one could either profess ignorance of them or suspect deception or collusion.

4. The miracles of our Lord were performed in the exercise of a divine power which belonged to Himself. The miracles of the prophets and apostles were done in

the name of God or of Jesus of Nazareth. The mighty works of Jesus were done in His own name. He always spoke in the tones of conscious omnipotence. "Damsel, I say unto thee, arise." "Young man, I say unto thee, arise." "Lazarus, come forth." "Peace, be still."

The words of our question, "*shewed from my Father*," imply that our Lord's miracles were also performed by the authority of the Father. They all bore the seal and signature of Jehovah. This important fact is stated more than once. "The work that I do in my Father's name they bear witness of me." "The work which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me." "If I do not the works of my Father believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works." It thus appears, not only that the miracles of Jesus were stamped with the approbation of the Father, but also that they furnished sufficient evidence that He was the promised Deliverer. These good works are just the things which the prophets foretold that Messiah would perform, Isa. xxxv. 5, 6. We have seen that they lacked nothing fitted to render them inviting and impressive. How, then, shall we acquit the Jews? How shall we acquit ourselves of basest injustice and ingratitude if we reject or oppose Him by whom they were done? Is this what He deserves at our hands? Who can count His mighty and merciful works? They are as many in number as the moments of our lives. On what grounds shall we justify ourselves if we return only evil to Him who has never done anything to us but good? What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits towards me?

Fifty-first.

WHAT SEEK YE?

JOHN i. 35.—Again, the next day after, John stood and two of his disciples: and looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned and saw them following, and saith unto them, *What seek ye?*

THIS question contains the first words spoken in public to the children of men by our blessed Lord. This short sentence, "What seek ye?" is the first ray of light sent forth into the darkness of earth by the rising Sun of Righteousness. Who has not felt the fascination arising from tracing the origin of whatever is great? With what peculiar and profound interest do we mark, for example, the source of a mighty river: the germ of a grand discovery: or the first steps of an undertaking that embraces the world in its range. With what emotions then should we contemplate the sublime scene laid open to our view by the exquisitely simple and artless words of this part of Scripture. For what have we here, but the beginning of the most stupendous enterprise recorded in the annals of the universe? It is nothing less than the laying of the foundation-stone of the empire of the Most High God; of that kingdom which shall break in pieces, and consume every other kingdom, and which shall stand for ever. Or to change the figure, here we

behold the Captain of the Lord's Host, enrolling the first two soldiers of the noblest army that ever took the field, whose glorious achievements, although not narrated by the historian, or sung by the poet of earth, "will be celebrated throughout eternity in the anthems of heaven."

The circumstances in which this great transaction took place are worthy of thoughtful attention. Where did it happen? It was on the bank of the Jordan, probably at the very spot where the ark and the ancient Israelites, at the end of the forty years' wanderings, crossed that river and entered into possession of the Land of Promise. How suggestive is this fact! Could any other spot be chosen more suitable for the passing of the Old Testament Church into the New; for the introduction of the kingdom of heaven, and for the first official appearance and recognition of the promised Messiah? Nor is the time when this remarkable event occurred less deserving of notice. The knell of the Old dispensation is rung. The fulness of time is come. The night of the Church's darkness is all but past, all its glimmering lights are gone down, except the Morning Star that announces the dawn of the glorious gospel-day. Jesus Christ has attained the prime of life and the full vigour of manhood. He has been publicly baptized with the Holy Ghost; during forty days He has contended with the great adversary, and has signally prevailed. And now He is coming up from the wilderness, travelling in the greatness of His strength, mighty to save. John Baptist, the divinely appointed herald, sees Him approaching. He recognizes Jesus, and in a moment his face beams with joy, and his eyes glow with holy fire. Raising his hand and pointing with the finger,

he exclaims with a voice trembling with emotion, Messiah is come! This is He! He stands before your eyes Behold the Lamb of God. Behold the Baptizer with the Holy Ghost!

We are not told what immediate impression was produced by this noble testimony on the minds of those who heard it for the first time. Surely words that have been so often and so greatly blessed since, were not spoken in vain on that solemn and memorable occasion. Very soon, indeed, their effects began to appear. On the following day John repeated his testimony in the presence of two of his disciples. One of them was Andrew, and there can be no doubt the other was John the Evangelist, though, with characteristic modesty, he does not mention his own name here, or in any other part of his gospel. When John Baptist repeated the same wonderful and gracious words, "Behold the Lamb of God," he virtually told his disciples to betake themselves to Jesus. So these two men understood and acted. They followed Jesus when He had no other followers. These are the first two stalks of corn gathered by the Lord of the harvest, from that field which is the world.

How does Jesus receive these two men? They have left their old master, and they are going after a stranger. How are they to introduce themselves? They are modest and timid, trembling and embarrassed. They cannot venture to approach Him, nor summon courage to address Him. Although His face is turned from them, He perceives their difficulty, and sympathizes with their delicacy. His heart yearns over them, He can refrain Himself no longer, therefore He turns round and asks in the gentlest and most winning accents, "What seek

ye?" It is as if He had said, His countenance beaming with love and joy all the while, Come near to me, I pray you. Let there be no distance, no distrust, and no reserve. You are most heartily welcome. I am most willing to help you, and to give you all that you need. I give you every encouragement. I place at your disposal all that I am and all that I have, and there is no good thing which is not mine. Make your choice. Just tell me what you would have, and I will give it unto you, here, and now, without money and without price.

Jesus knew why these men came after Him, and what they sought. Nevertheless He asked, "What seek ye?" And why did He question them thus? It was in order, at the very beginning of His ministry, to declare, with the utmost emphasis, that He will have intelligent disciples or none. He values not blind devotees, nor ignorant adherents. We cannot follow Him aright unless we know our own hearts. Therefore He would have us question ourselves very closely with regard to our motives and purposes. Why do I join the standard of the Lord? What seek I in following Him? Is it something which I dare not name, which I am ashamed to avow? or is it the salvation of my soul, that spiritual deliverance and blessing which Christ alone can give? What is it? Pause and consider. What did John and Andrew seek? Why did they come to Jesus? There are those who outwardly follow Him, simply because this has been done by a multitude of others; they do not like to be singular. Such could not have been the motive of these two men, for as we have seen already, they joined themselves to the Lord before any one else had done so. There are those that form an external connection with

Christ and His Church, in order to earn a good name, to advance their worldly interests, or to work out a righteousness of their own. Had these been the aims of the disciples, would they have forsaken first the powerful Pharisees, and then the popular Baptist? Not long after this, many repaired to Jesus on account of the beautiful words which He spoke, the wonderful works He did, and especially for the sake of the cures He wrought. Such could not have been the objects the two disciples sought, for they went after Jesus before He had uttered one word, or performed one miracle. What, then, do they want? They seek the substance of all the Old Testament types and symbols.

Observe the facts of their case. They have been the disciples of John. They have been listening to the preaching of the law of God. Their conscience has told them that instead of obeying, as they were bound to do, they have grievously disobeyed these commandments that are holy, just, and good. Therefore they deserve to be punished. The righteous God is displeased. All their sins are set in array before their eyes. What are they to do? They have tried all kinds of expedients. They have attempted to repent of their sin, and to reform their lives. They have multiplied acts of religious worship, service, and sacrifice. But all has been in vain. Conscience is not satisfied. God is not satisfied. In these circumstances what do they, what do all thoroughly awakened men seek? It is that which will satisfy the claims of divine justice; it is the pardon of their sins, granted, not any how, but upon sufficient grounds. And where is this to be found? Only, says John, in the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

There was another thing which the two disciples

sought with all their hearts. Sin is strong within them. Evil lusts and passions harass and torment their souls day and night. How are these principles to be subdued? Is it by vows, by fastings, by watchings, or by prayers? All these things have been tried and found wanting. Where, then, is deliverance to be found? Behold, says John, the Baptizer with that Holy Spirit, who uproots all evil, and creates the soul anew in knowledge and righteousness!

In common with all the children of men, John and Andrew were doubtless seeking happiness. They have been pursuing it in every place, at all times, and in all manner of ways. But their hearts still repine and cry, "give, give." To-day they have discovered the grand secret. Not only have they found in Jesus a complete remedy for the first and deepest necessities of their awakened consciences, even pardon of sin and purity of heart, but also in and through Him have they been led to rejoice in God alone as their chief good, and soul-satisfying portion; their loving Friend and everlasting Father.

Fifty-second.

HAST THOU NOT KNOWN ME?

JOHN xiv. 9. Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?

WHERE and how may true happiness be found? What is the answer of Jesus to this momentous question? In His farewell discourse He tells us that to see and enjoy our Father in Heaven is our highest happiness. God is the portion of our souls. He alone can satisfy the desires of our hearts. Philip seems to have felt in some measure that this was the case. Therefore, as soon as his Master had uttered this promise, "*from henceforth ye know Him and have seen Him*," he turned it into a prayer, Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us. Grant us this and we are content. We ask no more. This is all we desire. This prayer was undoubtedly very earnest. His whole soul yearned for a sight of the Father. Moreover he presented his petition to the only person who could fulfil the desire of his heart, for no man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him. Surely then Philip's prayer must be heard. But it was not so. He did not obtain the great boon he most fervently sought, and why? Because he did not need it. Although he knew it not he already possessed and had long possessed that which was far better than the thing he prayed for.

Mark what precisely was the desire of Philip's heart. What was the exact meaning of his request, "Shew us the Father?" There can be no doubt that what he wished was to have presented to his eyes some such glorious outward manifestation of Jehovah as had been granted once and again to the fathers and prophets. Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, saw the God of Israel and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. At the dedication of the temple the glory of the Lord so filled the house of God, that the priests could not stand before it. Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on a throne high and lifted up while His train filled the temple. Ezekiel witnessed the likeness of the glory of the Lord. He beheld the Almighty borne upon a chariot drawn by Cherubim and surrounded by flaming fire. According to the Jewish mode of interpreting prophecy, such magnificent and sublime manifestations of the presence and power of Jehovah as these, were to become more numerous and glorious in the time of Messiah. Hence, when the Master said, "from henceforth ye know and have seen the Father," Philip imagined that at length their most fondly cherished hopes were to be fulfilled, and that the divine glory was about to be revealed in all its predicted splendour; and therefore he immediately exclaimed, "Lord shew us the Father and it sufficeth us." Our Lord rejoined in terms expressive of disappointment, surprise and rebuke. "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." You ask Me to shew you the Father. Dost thou not know that I am God equal with the Father, the same in substance, nature, and perfections;

therefore to see Me acting is to see the Father acting, to hear me speaking is to hear the Father speaking, and to know Me is to know the Father. How sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? What but this have I been doing all these three years during which thou hast followed Me? Behold Me, realize who I am, study my words and works and you cannot fail to see the character and counsel, yea, the very heart of the Father. He whom no man hath seen at any time the only begotten Son hath declared. Jesus Christ is the only image of the invisible God, the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person. Whosoever saw Jesus saw God maifested in the flesh. In His person all the perfections of the Father were shown forth in the most attractive and affecting light. Take for example the divine holiness. Where shall we find the most impressive exhibition of the unsullied and unceasing purity of God? Beyond all question it is in the life and death of Christ. Here we have not abstract discussions but actual practice. Here we witness the holiness of God—not as it exists in heaven—beyond the reach of every danger and of every foe—and where there is not the slightest motive to sin, but we behold the spotless rectitude of one who lived in our nature and in our world, who felt all our sinless infirmities, encountered all our temptations in their most enticing forms, and was subjected to all our trials in their utmost severity, and who, nevertheless, never deviated so much as an hair's breadth from the path of duty. Or take the goodness of God. It is nowhere as strikingly seen as in the life of Him who went about doing good and healing all manner of diseases. No sorrowing nor suffering child of earth ever applied to Him in vain: the most unwor-

thy were made most welcome. The infirm, the blind, the deaf and dumb, the distressed and the dying, alike received the blessing they sought. Multitudes of miserable creatures came unto Him from every quarter, and not one of them was sent away unrelieved. Not only did all receive the benefit they sought; but infinitely more, the healing of the body was ever made the occasion of conveying salvation to the soul. Who can read the record of our Lord's life and especially of His miracles without being convinced that there is no limit to the goodness of God? The simple fact that He who was God came into this world in human form, became bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, and partook of all our infirmities and weaknesses, in order that He might die for our sins and raise us to the glory of heaven, is a proof of love, compared with which every other, however great in itself, is as nothing. And where was the patience of God ever seen as it is seen in Jesus Christ? The divine forbearance is evinced in His providential dealings with every member of the human family and with the whole race. It is an evidence of very wonderful long-suffering that God has not long ere now lost patience with apostate and rebellious men and cast them out from His presence for evermore. But how much is our sense of His patience increased when we behold the great Being we have offended, and who could with one breath of His mouth consume in one moment all the ungodly, dwelling in the midst of all the sins and abominations of this world, meekly enduring day by day all its hatred and contempt, and at last allowing himself to be led as a Lamb to the slaughter, and dying with these words on His lips, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." In like manner it might be shown,

with respect to all the other perfections of the divine nature, that they are manifested in the person of Christ with a fulness, a distinctness, and an impressiveness altogether unparalleled. This being the case can we wonder that the Lord should censure and chide Philip for the ignorance and misconception of which his request gave proof? The question put to him plainly implies that he might have known and ought to have known that his Master was a divine person in human form and therefore a far more complete and glorious representation of the Father than the pillar of cloud and fire, the shekinah, or any other symbol that ever had been or ever could be seen on earth. Philip was indeed greatly at fault. He was one of the first called to the apostleship. For more than three years he had enjoyed the unspeakable privilege of the most intimate intercourse with the Lord, and although he may never have heard the Master say in so many words, I am God manifest in the flesh, yet he had listened to many plain intimations, and he had beheld many most glorious miracles which admitted of no other explanation than that He by whom they were spoken and done was the possessor of the same divinity which belongs to the Father Himself. But notwithstanding all these things, Philip seemed to have no firm nor abiding conviction that his Master was truly Divine. Therefore Jesus speaks to him in the language of astonishment, regret, and reproof, "Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou then shew us the Father?"

Do we not deserve the same rebuke? When I think and speak, read and hear of Jesus, do I realize and remember that He is one with the Father? Do I listen to

His words as if they came to me with supreme authority? Does the incarnation reveal to me the character and counsel, the grace and heart of Jehovah? Do I see the glory of God shining as in a mirror in the face of Jesus Christ? Are the sufferings and sacrifice of the Messiah regarded by me as the sufferings and sacrifice of God incarnate? When I think of them is my soul therefore filled with unutterable wonder and gratitude, hope and joy?

When I compare the progress I have made in saving knowledge with the privileges I have enjoyed, do I not feel that the Master has great reason to chide and rebuke me? Might He not say to me also, "Have I been so long time with thee and yet hast thou not known me?" During many years has Jesus been with me by His word of Spirit and Providence. Do I even yet know Him? Alas, even if I do, in some measure,—how little do I know of Him compared with what I might have known and ought to have known. How justly might He complain of my ignorance and my errors.

Let me earnestly endeavour to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let me regularly and thoughtfully read the word of God; let me unceasingly and fervently pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto me the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of the Son of God, that I may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that so I may be filled with all the fulness of God.

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