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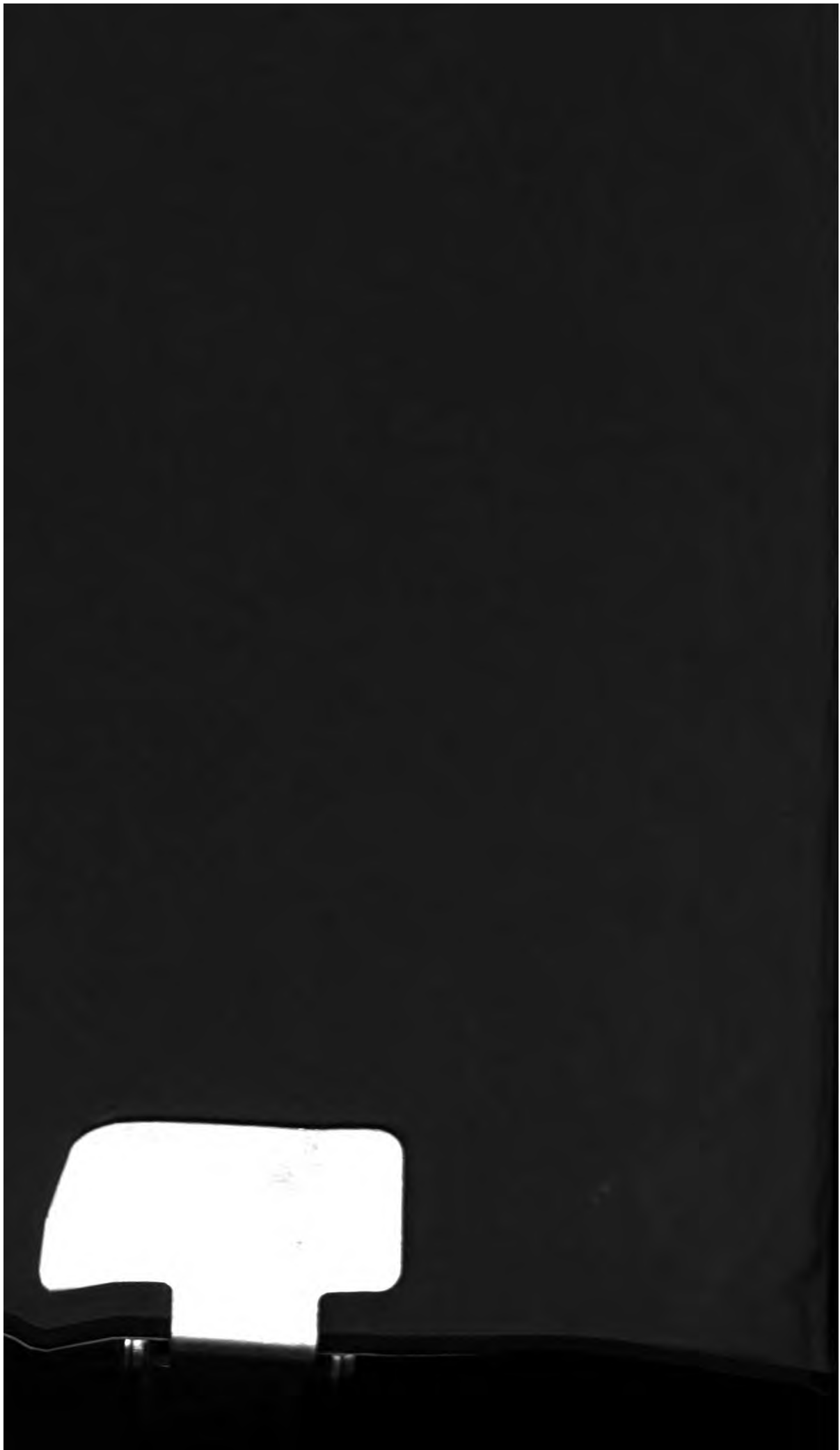
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Parochial sermons

William Jackson

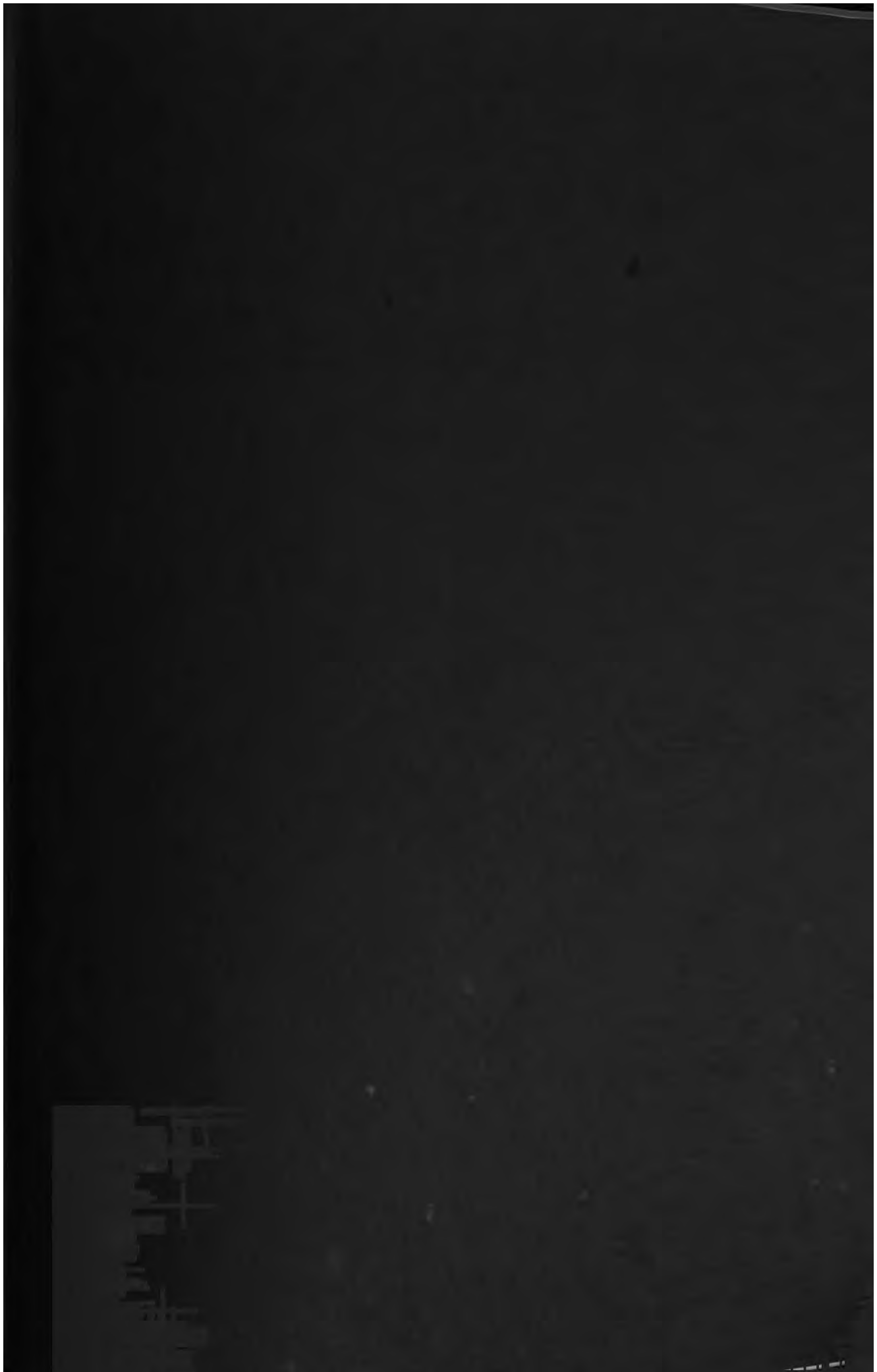












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THE EYES OF GOD UPON THE TRUTH.

JEREMIAH V. 3.

“ O Lord, are not Thine eyes upon the truth ? ”

THE prophet here sets forth God's knowledge of the heart of man. He looks through all disguises, and lays bare all their pretences. “ Though they say, The Lord liveth ; surely they swear falsely ; ” *yet He is not deceived*, “ to whom all hearts are open. ” In His loving-kindness He had chastened them, to bring them to a better mind. “ Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved ; Thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. ” Chastisement only revealed their hypocrisy.

I. Beware, therefore, dear brethren, of self-deceit, for you cannot deceive God. You may blind yourself, and you may blind others, but God you cannot deceive. The prophets may prophesy falsely, and the priests may bear rule by their means (ver. 31) ; but through all the complications of our deceitful hearts, one patient, piercing eye penetrates, tracing every turn of the

subtle maze of human falsehood, and pronounces it "*a wonderful and a horrible thing*" (ver. 30). Take this home to your heart; try to realize it. See how all double-dealing, all flattery of self and others in the ways of sin, appear in the eye of God. It is "horrible," "wonderful!" Ahab is more hateful than Jehu. Judas betraying Christ with a kiss is more awful than Herod with his men of war, setting Him at naught.

II. But, dear brethren, there is a more encouraging view of these words: "*O Lord, are not Thine eyes upon the truth?*" We may take them apart from the false professors of the time of Jeremiah, and view them in their relation to less depraved hearts. These blessed words are true, not only for the self-deceiver, who would fain cloke his inmost thoughts from the eye of God Himself; but they are true also for the honest and single-eyed seeker for the light, who prays, "*Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart; prove me, and examine my thoughts.*" God's eyes are upon the *truth*. Whatever there is of truth in us, He sees it, He recognizes it. Every true purpose of amendment, every sincere desire for a higher life, every honest effort to overcome temptation, stands out clearly and distinctly before Him. Much that is good in the hearts of the timid and weak may be hidden from the eye of man, by wanderings and failures; but deep down in the heart God sees the little seed of good, and marks the spring of life within. When Nicodemus

came to Jesus *by night* he was not repelled as a coward. Some teachers might have rejected him, as unworthy to be taught, unless he would come boldly by daylight and defy the scorn and enmity of the Pharisees and doctors of the law. But Jesus saw in his first timid advance the germ of that courage which should be hereafter shown when "he went" boldly "to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus" (Matt. xxvii. 58), at a time when His avowed disciples held back. Again, when the doubting father of the unhappy child possessed with a dumb spirit, besought our Lord, "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion upon us and help us," instead of resenting the doubt Jesus encouraged his wavering faith, until the father of the child cried out with tears, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" (Mark ix. 24, 25). The gracious eyes of Jesus were fixed upon the little spark of true faith which lay almost hidden in the doubting, trembling heart of this anguish-stricken man; and by His gentle, patient treatment He drew forth the deep reality of faith tempered by humility, which is shown in the words of the sufferer, "*Help Thou mine unbelief.*" When Peter, despising the warning of his gracious Master, broke his promise, and three times denied his Lord, we read that "Jesus turned, and looked upon Peter." What, then, did He see? *Not* the cowardice only, nor the selfishness (which any one might have seen); nor did He see only the *presumption* which had led to these sins,

though that was visible enough. No; His eyes were "upon the *truth*." He saw the hard struggle; He saw the new-born repentance; He saw the fountain of bitter tears which were so soon to burst forth; He saw the first buddings of those resolutions which were to bring forth a nobler, braver, yet humbler life. He saw the root of love which still lived in that bruised and broken heart. When even the loving Paul could see in Mark, "who departed from them in Pamphilia, and went not to the work," nothing but a vacillating spirit and a feeble will, HE whose eyes are "upon the truth," discerned in him at least the rudiments of those graces which made him "profitable to St. Paul, for the ministry."

Thus does the *All-seeing* eye discern the true state of every humble heart. Thus are all our secret thoughts, the faintest workings of our wills and affections, "naked and open in the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." He sees the pervading evil in the slave of sin, in spite of all deceptions, whether self-deceptions or wilful hypocrisy. He sees the true and upright purpose in the "honest and good heart." He sees the better aspirations, the new longings after holiness, the first formations of a nobler purpose in the heart too long given to the world or the flesh. He sees it to *cherish* and to *invigorate* it. He sees the mingling of the *baser motives* in the right actions of His servants. He sees it to chasten and restrain. "Oh Lord, are not Thine eyes upon the truth?"

What profit, then, is it thus, my brethren, to call to mind, and think over, the all-piercing truth of the eye of God? What do we gain by realizing His knowledge of our inmost heart?

In the first place it deepens our adoration. How can we do otherwise than to tremble before that awful knowledge which thus searches out our spirits?—which marks in their true colours all our ways of vanity, and lays bare all our little self-deceptions? We exclaim, with the Psalmist, “*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; I cannot attain unto it.*” We feel our own vileness, our natural falsehood, the deceitfulness of our hearts, while we magnify His truth, His purity, His wisdom.

Secondly, the thought of God’s perfect knowledge of our heart brings us nearer to Him; it makes us feel that He is our only hope, our only refuge. Since we cannot escape Him, what can we do but fly to Him for help? “Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit; or whither shall I go from Thy presence?” expresses well our sense of the impossibility of escaping or deceiving Him. Since, then, we cannot hide ourselves *from* Him, we must hide ourselves *in* Him. Since we can have no secrets which His eye discerneth not, we had better spread our little meannesses before Him, and beseech Him to wipe them all away, and to ennoble us with His free Spirit.

In the third place, the consideration that “God’s eyes are upon the *truth*” should be the

greatest possible encouragement to us in our endeavours after self-improvement. We fail so often, and so often only half fulfil our best intentions, that man, who sees nothing but the outward act, often misjudges us, to our great discouragement. Nay, more, we ourselves almost doubt our own sincerity, when we see how far short our deeds fall below our promises. At such times it is our comfort to know that "*God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things.*" Whatever portion of true sincerity is in us, He knows better even than we know ourselves.

While our eyes are fixed upon the first failure, or at least our half-fulfilled resolution, He sees the final victory, the glorious perfection of all-subduing grace. He sees the truth that is of His own implanting. He watches the putting forth of the tender blade, not with a mere gaze of observation; He nourishes it with the dew of His blessing. He warms it with the sun of His love, until the ear is developed, and the full corn of the ear yields the harvest of eternal life.

4. Again, the eyes of God are upon the truth, and as we think upon it, and bring it home to ourselves, *we also may learn to love the truth.* We pray God to search and try our hearts, that we may know ourselves the better. We lay before Him all our deceits and double-dealings, that He may bring them to the light, and show them to us such as they really are, and to make us hate them, and turn from them. We love

that He should mark in us whatsoever is pleasing in His sight—the genuine fruit of His Spirit, in order that the answer of a good conscience may be ours, by the witness of His Spirit with our spirits.

III. But we must not leave this subject without dwelling upon a still higher and more blessed sense, in which the eyes of God “*are upon the truth,*” to all His redeemed children, who abide in His love. The face of His Anointed One, who is very “Truth” itself, is the only object in this fallen world on which the All-seeing eyes can rest with perfect satisfaction: “THOU art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” If His image be found in us, then we can bear the eye of God, not otherwise. If we be found in Him, resting upon Him by faith, cleaving to Him in love, joined to Him in an everlasting covenant, *then* are we the sons of God, beloved of the Father, for His dear Son’s sake.

Thus, then, does the consideration of God’s all-seeing eye draw us up again unto Himself, not as mere natural men, meeting that eye from which they cannot escape, but as *redeemed* sinners, washed in the blood of the Lamb, accepted in the Lord our righteousness, and prepared to see with loving eyes Him who is altogether lovely.

This view of the meaning of the text serves, as we dwell upon it, to deepen and hallow those practical lessons which I have endeavoured to set before you. If Christ is indeed our only true life,

and if God sees us as living children only in HIM, how awful is that vain profession without true faith in Him, or love for Him—a profession which may impose upon others, which may even deceive ourselves, but which cannot unite us to Christ, and which therefore cannot make us well-pleasing to Him whose eyes are upon *the truth*.

If, on the other hand, we are sincere; if we are really trying earnestly to love our Saviour, and to keep His commandments, then how blessed an encouragement it is to feel that the eyes of God are upon the *truth* in us; that is, upon our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who dwells within us by His Spirit. If we have true faith, though it be weak, God sees not the weakness; His eyes are upon Him who, by even that weak faith, is made our own. God sees us, not as we are in ourselves, but *as we are renewed* in His likeness, who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification.

It is thus, also, that in our Lord Jesus Christ we may most surely learn to see that truth which is ever clear and whole beneath the eye of God. If we could see simply all our sinfulness and misery as God sees it, the sight would be more than we could bear. The sight of our sins would be as terrible to us as it would be to a man gazing down a dreadful precipice, as the earth was giving way beneath his feet! But if we see ourselves as we trust that *God* sees us, delivered from going down to the pit, because he has found a ransom—

then we may look down into the depths without the horrible dread of falling headlong, since the Almighty arm upholds us. We may search out all our sins, and confess them without further defilement, because it is thus that we wash away their deepest stains in the blood of Christ. If, therefore, it is in Christ alone that we can safely behold the deep sinfulness of our own hearts and lives, much more in Him alone can we see the truth of holiness, pureness, and wisdom. As in His blood the stain of repented sin is done away, and as by His all-availing atonement the guilt of sin is removed, so by the grace of His Spirit must the veil be taken away from our eyes, that we may see what is good and right in His sight.

All that *God* sees in us of sincerity He sees as the fruit of that True Vine, into which He has grafted us. All that *we* see of true holiness, true beauty, true wisdom, we see by the grace which is given to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. In His pure and spotless life we behold the perfection of goodness. Look at His holy childhood! It is *there* that Christian children see the truth of holy earnestness in God's works, combined with meek submission of an earthly parent's will.

See Him as He comes to man's estate, healing the sick, comforting the mourners; it is there we see the blessedness of true charity.

Listen to Him teaching the ignorant: it is by these gracious words that we learn to discern the truth; that truth of which He said, "If ye

continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John viii. 31, 32).

Watch Him learning to bear His sore trials with un murmuring patience: it is there that we behold Divine resignation.

Behold Him rising from the dead, glorious; follow Him ascending into heaven triumphantly: there we see goodness in its final victory over evil. "O Lord, Thine eyes are upon the truth." Open then *our* eyes, as Thou didst open the eyes of the servant of Elisha (2 Kings vi. 17), that we also may behold the *truth*, and love it.

To sum up: God's eyes are upon the truth. He sees every sin, even the most hidden. Fear therefore to sin, even secretly. God sees every good thought, therefore persevere. He sees thee as thou art; therefore be honest and sincere. He sees thee, not as unkind, uncharitable neighbours see thee; therefore do not despair. He sees the truth, pure and perfect in Christ. *In Him, therefore, hide thyself*, that thou mayest be pure, and good, and true *in Him*. And as thou abidest in Him, gaze lovingly and faithfully upon Him, that thou also mayest see and love for ever that truth which is precious in the sight of God.

BACKSLIDING.

JOHN vi. 66—68.

“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? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”

“WILL ye also go away?” These pleading words were spoken not for those twelve only, but for every heart here that has ever heard the loving voice of Jesus. The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. He beheld us wandering in sin and error as sheep scattered upon the mountains; and, leaving the angels which never fell, He sought us out and found us, in our misery; and, of His tender mercy and deep love, He remembered us among His redeemed flock. If we leave Him, if we turn again to “wander through all the mountains, and upon every high hill,” a prey to “all the beasts of the field” (Ezek. xxxiv. 5, 6), we rob Him of the fruit of the travail of His soul; we grieve His tender heart; and, because He cannot bear to see us

perish after He has rescued us at the cost of so great suffering, He pleads with us earnestly, "*Will ye also go away?*"

O let us listen, dear brethren, to His pleading voice, and so learn to feel more deeply the wickedness and the misery of the backslider.

Holy Scripture and our consciences combine to show us that to forsake the service of God, after we have once entered upon it, is a greater sin than to reject it from the first. St. Peter says distinctly, speaking of those who had received the gospel, "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (1 Peter ii. 26). And of those who finally fall away from the faith it is said, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that they "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame" (Heb. vi. 6). "As I live, saith the Lord God, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters" (Ezek. xvi. 48).

And again, the sin of Judah is represented as greater than the sin of Israel, because she rejected greater grace, and abused higher privileges. "Backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah" (Jer. iii. 11). And why? Because among the people of Judah the true worship of God was retained for many generations; her people were ruled by righteous kings, the sanctuary of God was in their holy city, the

Paschal Lamb was offered among them, and the daily sacrifice remained; yet from all this they turned away, forsaking the living God, and giving themselves to idolatry.

Even so *among ourselves*,—if we have known the love of God, and experienced the power of His grace; if we have received His merciful forgiveness, and of our own free-will undertaken His service, how great must be our sin if we again enrol ourselves under the banners of His great enemy! “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy . . . 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.)

But not only does the backslider bear a heavier load of guilt than those who have never known peace with God; *his* misery has a peculiar bitterness because, having once known spiritual joy in the Lord, the pleasures of sin *will not satisfy* him; having partaken of the heavenly manna, his higher sense revolts against the coarser food of earth, even while his lower appetites crave their accustomed indulgence. “The backslider in heart,” says the wise man, “shall be filled *with his own ways*” (Prov. xiv. 14); and what are those ways but the ways of DEATH? Let him seek never so much to drown the recollection of what he has

been, and whence he has fallen, yet the consciousness of his miserable deterioration will haunt him in loneliness and silence, and fill him with remorse and fear. Even in his seemingly gayest hours his soul is overshadowed, and the light of peace is darkened within him. He cannot be *thoughtless*; he cannot be *careless*; he can no more rid himself of anxiety and the sense of guilt, than *the dreaming murderer can wash his hands clean of the damning blood-stains*.

If such be the misery and guilt of those who turn from Christ, what remains but that we should turn to the all-merciful Saviour, and hear His loving invitation: "Will ye also go away?" Surely you will reply with St. Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" If we go to the world, its highest honours, its most fascinating pleasures, will not satisfy the immortal spirit *which has once been raised above the world*, and on the Mount of Transfiguration, in the glorious light of joy and love which shine from the Redeemer's face, has exclaimed — "It is good for us to be here" (Matt. xvii. 4). If we turn to the flesh, the bitterness of remorse will be the abiding taste of every cup of pleasure. To whomsoever we go, if *we turn away from Christ*, we shall surely hear within our inmost soul the solemn doom: "*Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God*" (Jer. ii. 19).

Let us, then, *beware* of the *first backward steps*. For we must not forget backsliding, as distinguished from a sudden fall (such as St. Peter's, when he denied his Lord under the pressure of fear), is a gradual process; and is therefore the more dangerous, because we are far gone from peace with God before we are aware of it. Let us trace the steps of those "disciples" who from that time "went back, and walked no more with Him."

We read, in the forty-first verse of this chapter, that the Jews murmured at Jesus, because He said, "I am the Bread which came down from heaven." And that these Jews were believers we cannot doubt; for they are evidently the same persons who said, as we read in the fourteenth verse: "*This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.*" They are the same who (having witnessed His marvellous power in the miracle of the loaves) would have made Him a King; who, when they found that He had crossed the sea, took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus, and who had inquired of our Lord, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" (vers. 15, 24, 28). First, then, they *murmured* because He said that He was the Bread which came down from heaven. Next, they "strove among themselves, saying, *How can this man give us His flesh to eat?*" Again they said of His further exposition of the same truths, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?"

And lastly, when He taught them their own helplessness, and the sovereignty of God, "No man can come to me, except it were given him of my Father," "many of them went back, and walked no more with Him."

It would seem, at first sight, as though backsliding in these days were brought about by very different causes; and yet, if we observe them more closely, we shall see that it is essentially the same. Men draw back commonly because they find it more difficult to be religious than they expected, and therefore they grow weary of the struggle. In the first fervour of a newly-kindled hope, when sin was felt to be horrible, it seemed as if to serve God, to keep His commandments, and to look forward to the heavenly reward, would be easy and *natural*: that is, they expected that their *nature* would accord with their new hopes and their noble aspirations. They were not prepared to carry on a continual contest with the remaining infection of nature. Finding that God will save them only by imparting to them a higher nature, continually renewed and strengthened by the true Heavenly Bread, and that this gift of a new nature involves a continual warfare, so that (in the words of the Apostle) "the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh" — *they draw back*. Alas! they do not love to be wholly renewed, unless it could be done without a struggle, easily, simply, *naturally*; without self-denial, without

self-conquest in the power of Christ's nature imparted to them.

In like manner they revolt from the doctrine of spiritual influence, expressed in the words, "except the Father, which hath sent *ME*, draw him." If they could walk with Christ, and yet at the same time go *their own way*, and the *world's way*, they would gladly do so. But they do not like to be *drawn* back from following the bent of their own hearts. They do not love to be led from the broad, self-pleasing road, and to be guided through the strait gate, and along the narrow way that leadeth unto life.

I believe that many cases of backsliding may be traced to, first, a *reluctance* to close communion with Christ, such as the feeding spiritually on His body and blood involves; and secondly, a confiding in self, instead of in the grace and power of God. Take, for example, a case which is by no means uncommon. One who has hitherto lived without deep religious thought, is aroused from his careless life by some sudden calamity; or by some secret influence, the fear of God's wrath overshadows his heart; or some word of the preacher, like a barbed arrow, pierces the armour of selfish indifference, and cannot lightly be drawn out again from the wound; or, by some severe disappointment, he discovers how impossible it is that his soul can be satisfied with the good things of this life. Thus the desire of heavenly joys is

kindled within him, and the love of Christ warms his higher affections.

But it is in the very nature of first impressions to grow weaker. Who does not know the difference between the first keen joy in some newly-discovered treasure, as contrasted with the staid and sober feeling with which we think it over in a day or two? It is not altogether different with religious feelings. The fear which at first seems to overwhelm the soul is gradually calmed down; and the hope of heaven itself, when it becomes a "hope deferred, maketh the heart sick."

But why, dear brethren, should this glorious hope, the very beacon of our voyage through life, become a "hope deferred?" It is because *by absence from Christ* we lose the foretaste of the hope. By permitting seemingly slight faults to pass uncorrected, by carelessness in devotion, by allowing ourselves to take too deep an interest in the world, our peace is marred, and our confidence in our ever-present Saviour is weakened. Forgetting our entire dependence upon His grace, and losing the sense of His love, the conscience is dulled, presumption follows, the world allures, the flesh consents—and we, miserable sinners, fall away! To such a downfall let us ever remember that we are continually exposed, unless we abide in Christ by a true spiritual union; and, distrusting ourselves, let us renew our failing strength, as Sampson did, by the sweet honey—the meat

that doth not perish, which is yielded by the Strong (Judges xiv. 8, 14).

In guarding ourselves, therefore, against the awful danger of backsliding, let us observe a strict and conscientious living, *as in the sight of God*, so that we may not, by laxity and indifference, alienate our hearts from Christ.

1. Let us exercise continual *watchfulness*.

2. Let us be careful in our *daily prayers*.

3. Let us carefully search and try our hearts, and, with a clear conscience, draw near to our gracious Saviour in the Holy Communion.

(1) Let us *watch* against the beginnings of sin; let us guard the very first motions of thought, and keep in check the first stirrings of evil desires. The soul is like a besieged citadel; it is of little avail to shut out the powerful foe if we let in the crafty spy, who, in the silence of the night, will open the city gates, and admit the army of the enemy. Ah! *how little do we think that eternal damnation enters in through the narrow passage of indulged imaginations!*

(2) Again, *daily prayer*, offered up with reverence and thoughtfulness, will realize to us our dependence upon God, and save us from vain self-confidence. For prayer brings us into the very presence of God; and when we are *there* we feel that *in Him* we live, and move, and have our being.

(3) *Frequent Communion* should be received, as our Lord's own appointed means for the renewing

of our strength. We should not come to the Lord's Supper as a mere formal observance; but (in the words of the Apostle) receive the "*cup of blessing*" as "*the communion of the blood of Christ,*" and "*the bread which we break*" as "*the communion of the body of Christ*" (1 Cor. xi. 16). Then shall we find fulfilled in ourselves the promise, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isa. xl. 31).

In conclusion, if there be any one here who is conscious that he has gone away from Christ, to whom the guilt and the misery which I have described as the portion of backsliders is too well known by experience, let him not, for that reason, despair of the mercy of God.

Hear the gracious invitation which God addresses to you by His prophet, "*Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever*" (Jer. iii. 12).

Have you not learnt, by your own bitter experience, to feel most acutely the truth of St. Peter's saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" For you have tried what others can do to make you happy, and you know that they have miserably failed. Listen, then, again to the invitation of your merciful Father, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings;" and answer,

with God's ancient people, "Behold, we come unto Thee, for Thou art the Lord our God" (Jer. iii. 22). "O Lord our God, other lords beside Thee *have* had dominion over us: but by Thee only will we make mention of Thy name" (Isa. xxvi. 13).

Surely that Christ only has the words of eternal life is not merely a reason why the disciples should not go away: it is also a good reason why the backslider should return to Him who is his only hope.

THE MEASURE OF LOVE.

EPHESIANS iii. 14—19.

“ I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man ; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 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 ye might be filled with all the goodness of God.”

It is a high and glorious prayer which the Apostle offers for the Ephesian converts, and it points out to us, dear brethren, a high and glorious calling. Oh, is it not our true happiness *to have Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith?* Is it not the true end of our being? Is it not the noblest thing on earth, that *being rooted and grounded in love, we may be able to comprehend (i. e. to grasp, to lay hold of, and to see for ourselves), “ the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ; and to*

know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge ? ”
Yes, the love of Christ has surpassed the knowledge even of angels ; for they, as we, desire to look into those mysteries. The angels saw the fall of man ; they witnessed his first departure from God, and they drove him out from paradise. Again, the angels saw the electing love of God shown towards Abraham ; and they doubtless were the messengers by whom he was called out from his own land, and brought into the land of Canaan, God’s gift to him and to his children. Again, God’s merciful dealings with His chosen people were ministered by angels, who thus became witnesses of His mercy and His grace. But God’s love, in Jesus Christ, surpassed even *their* knowledge. Not until it was made known to them by the Church, did even the angels know that the Gentiles also, the proud and learned Greeks, the strong and haughty Romans, the poor degraded savages, and we, also, in our heathen ignorance *should* (by God’s mercy) *be gathered into the one fold of the Church, and embraced in the loving arms of the Good Shepherd. . .* But now this boundless love, which once was strange to angels, is made known even unto us ; and we are called upon, in the words of the wise and loving Paul, “to comprehend, with all saints, the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

The cross is the one measure of the love of Christ. Upon its *length* the body of the pure and spotless

One, the loving and merciful Jesus, was stretched, torn, racked, and bleeding. Upon its *breadth* His gracious arms were expanded to embrace "the heaven, and the earth, and all that is therein;" for "God was in Christ, *reconciling the world* unto Himself;" and, "whosoever will run into His open arms will surely find refuge there from all the troubles of this life, and from all the overwhelming terrors of the next.

In the *depth* of the cross of Christ, planted lowly in the ground, we see how His infinite love descended even to the lowest depths of misery, and can therefore comfort and succour us under all our afflictions. And in the *height* of the cross, whereon was written, in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin, the inscription, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," we see Him lifting the beggar from the dust, and setting him among princes; and we see also how it is His will to make us kings and priests unto God for ever. Even the writing of this inscription in *Latin*, and *Greek*, as well as in *Hebrew*, and stating that it was "Jesus of *Nazareth*," are not without their meaning; they show that this honour is not only for the ancient favoured people of God, but for Latins, and Greeks, and poor despised Galilæans and Samaritans as well.

It is a glorious sight upon which the Apostle would have us dwell, when he prays that we 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.”

Why, then, does he set this glorious sight before us? It is that we may learn, by experience, the mutual action of love. Christ's love towards us is the cause of our love towards Him; and yet *our* love is required, that we may comprehend *His*. Fitly, therefore, does the Apostle first pray for the strengthening might of the Holy Spirit; and couple that with the gift of faith; and then proceed to the rooting and grounding in love. For this is ever God's order, in dealing with the immortal souls that He has created by His word, and redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. First cometh hearing, then faith; and the Holy Spirit, pervading all, is given in fuller measure when faith is made perfect, and passes on into the depth of love.

The first beginnings of heavenly love within the soul take place when the infinite love of Jesus first touches the heart. When by faith we stand before His cross, and behold the sorrows beyond all earthly sorrows which He endured for our salvation, then the fire of love is kindled in our hearts, and He becomes the object of our love, Who alone can satisfy our immortal spirits. Then, as deeper meditations open to us more and more the depths of *His* love, *our* love is also deepened, while, at the same time, by heaven-blest afflictions, our hearts are softened to receive the impression; and by a more constant obedience the power of

faith is strengthened, whereby we hold fast to Him who dwells within us, by His Spirit, as the fire of love.

The one great lesson of the passage is this, that *love is the very foundation of the Christian life*. All really good fruit is produced only by those trees in the Lord's garden which are "rooted and grounded in love." All alms, deeds, all devotions, all self-denials; nay, more, all true knowledge—in fact, all real growth in grace—must be rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, or it will certainly wither and die under the burning heat of trial. But how can we practically implant deeply in our hearts the love of Christ? and how can we train the heavenly plant when it is once rooted there? Thank God, we may do much, trusting in the Holy Spirit, and referring all graces to His indwelling might. We can sanctify all that we think, and say, and do, by the memory of His loving-kindness. We can set apart special seasons for a more careful, calmer, deeper meditation on His love—reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting the records of His love.

Let us, then, *now* in the stillness of God's house, recount His love as here set forth by the Apostle. Let us see whether we cannot stamp more clearly on our minds a separate image of each aspect of His love, as here set forth; and so approach more nearly to measuring the immeasurable, and to knowing that which passeth knowledge.

1. In "*the breadth*" of His Divine love the blessed Saviour embraces doubtless *all His creatures*, but more especially *all* those who partake that nature which He assumed. When He was made *man* He became the Redeemer of all mankind. "God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." His redemption was not restricted to the Jews, as the self-righteous Pharisees would fain have flattered themselves; nor are His mercies now shut up within the pale of one infallible Church, as the Romanists proudly boast. It is not for those only who believe themselves "elect" that Christ died. Oh, no, my brethren, the love of Christ is far wider than the narrow heart of selfish men is willing to allow! Nothing but wilful unbelief and deliberate rebellion can cut off any true penitent from the love of Him that passeth knowledge. Miserable, then, are those that try to fence in that love, and so "make sad the heart of the righteous, whom God hath not made sad." Miserable are they in their folly; but, thank God, they cannot succeed. Oh no! as well might we put limits to the ocean, and say to rolling flood, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further," as to try to fence in the boundless love of God in Jesus Christ. No longer is there Jew, or Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, but all are embraced in one holy brotherhood in the love of Christ, if they be willing to accept His love. Dream not, then, poor despond-

ing brother or sister, that thou art beyond the reach of His love. If thy trembling heart yearns towards Him, He will, in His own good time, reveal Himself to thee in the breadth of His all-embracing love.

“*The length.*” All through the eternal ages did the loving Saviour look forward to the hour when love should show itself in its fulness on the cross. Before the world was, He said, “Lo, I come.” He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

Behold Him, as He hung upon the cross, *the central point of love!* The efficacy of that precious sacrifice, *and therefore the love which prompted it, reached back* to the first sin, even that which was committed in paradise: it *centred* in the penitent thief, who hung beside Him; it *looked forward* to the last contrite-hearted sinner that the world will see before the judgment day!

Yes, even in the midst of His severest agony He looked all down the coming ages, and saw the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind pressing into the kingdom, and seeking consolation and rest in His love. All sighs, all tears, all earnest resolutions, all true self-denials He saw and loved.

Again, *the length* of Christ’s love is seen in His long-suffering patience, wherewith He *bears* with us through all our sinful lives.

The depth. In the *depth* of His love He tasted the deepest of all human miseries, that He might

be able to feel for them with the depth of a most tender sympathy. "Deep calleth unto deep;" the deep of man's misery to the deep of God's mercy, and from the depth of His love the gracious Saviour sends an answer of peace.

Again, there are none who have fallen so low, either in circumstances or character, as to be excluded from His love. Mary Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, received Christ's love into her heart. The publican, who dared not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, was yet revived by the inbreathing of pardoning love. The poor beggar Lazarus, ragged, and full of sores, despised of man, and cared for only by the dogs, was yet beloved of angels, whose hearts reflect the boundless love which beams on them from the face of God. Not even the man who had the legion, and wore no clothes, who had his dwelling among the tombs, was shut out from the love of Christ.

The height of Christ's love. It reacheth even to the heaven of heavens. "As the Father loveth Me, even so love I you." The love of Jesus is the golden chain which links us to the throne of God. By His love we are made partakers of the Divine nature; His exalted love was not satisfied merely to restore sinful man to the condition from which he had fallen: but, by so marvellous a mystery of Divine love was our redemption wrought, that the fallen nature which He had

taken to Himself is exalted above every created being. Nothing would satisfy Him who descended into the prison-house of our fallen humanity but that the prisoners should be raised from their dungeon to be highly exalted in the palace of the King of kings.

Behold then, dear brethren, with loving thankfulness, the glorious spectacle of self-denying love. See it in all its *breadth*, and *length*, and *depth*, and *height*. Gaze lovingly and thankfully on *all-suffering* love, as manifested upon the cross, and then raising your eyes, even to the throne of God, behold that same Incarnate Love seated on the right hand of God *in the fulness of bliss*. Then, as that love enters into your heart, you will “be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man.” You will be strong in the strength of His love; and in all trials and temptations you will be more than conquerors, through Him that loved you, and gave Himself for you. May God give us all that strong confidence in His love and power which will persuade us that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.” Then will our years be happy—happy in a loving obedience; happy in the consciousness of God’s love; happy on the bed of death, because the peace of God which passeth all

understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son, Jesus Christ; happy, above all, on the resurrection day, when we shall behold Him in His glory.

THE STRONG MAN ARMED.

LUKE xi. 21, 22.

“When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.”

IN the words of the text we have set forth the wonderful mystery of the doctrine of spiritual influence. We see how God's Holy Spirit works in the heart of His faithful servants, and we also see how the evil one works in the heart of the wicked.

It would at first sight seem that the spirit of man moves in solitude. Our inmost thoughts, our secret purposes, our most cherished wishes, our concealed fears, lie hidden from our fellow-men; as if we could enclose them in our hearts, and hide them from every eye. YES! from every *human* eye; but not from the eye of God. For “all things”—and therefore our thoughts—“are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. iv. 13). God sees us through and through. He traces every secret thought; nay, more, He moulds, and guides, and

governs all our inmost breathings of thought and feeling. He warms the loving heart, He informs the patient truth-seeker, He steadies the wavering but faithful soul, and deepens the penitence of the humble mourner. *For, lo, there is not a word in my tongue, but Thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether. Thou hast fashioned me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me. Thou understandest my thoughts long before*" (Ps. cxxxix. 3, &c.).

And, as God by His Holy Spirit thus rules and regulates the hearts of His faithful people, so does the evil spirit, the treble tempter, the great enemy of man, rule the hearts of the wicked and the God-forgetting.

But if it be hard for the servants of God to be at all times conscious of His gracious influences, how much more difficult must it be for the bond-slaves of Satan to realize whose servants they are?

That their heart is a palace for the devil, they cannot for a moment believe. If they have never tried to free themselves from the bondage of evil habits, they are unconscious how sore their bondage is, or how securely their master holds them in his toils. Even when they acknowledge that they are wrong in some respects, they still consider themselves their own masters, and think that they can put themselves right whenever they feel so inclined.

But God's word reveals to us the awful power of evil spirits. Here and there, in the Bible, we see drawn aside the curtain which hides the spirits, good and bad, from our sight, as recorded in the

words of holy Job. "There was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also to present himself before the Lord. And the Lord said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (Job ii. 1, 2). And more expressly to our purpose are the awful mysteries of the unseen world, revealed by the mouth of the lying spirit, to the destruction of the wicked King Ahab (1 Kings xxii. 19, &c.). "I will go forth," said the evil spirit, "and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all the prophets" of the doomed monarch, God permitting him to go.

Here, then, we see an evil spirit entering into the prophets of a wicked king, deceiving *them*, and leading *him* to destruction; prefiguring the doom of Judas the traitor, into whom (after supper) "Satan entered," and took possession. Even so, in the words of the text, "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are at peace." The strong man is Satan: "his palace" is the heart of the wicked: "his goods" are the powers, the affections, the influence, the mind, the soul, the body, the members, and the strength of the man. These the evil one makes his own, and turns them to his own purposes.

If we admit into our hearts impurity, anger, envy, or other evil passions, *then* Satan enters in and takes possession.

1. He enters, for instance, into one strong in will, determined in purpose. That strong determination, that steadfast purpose, which should have been dedicated to do God's will and promote His glory, is perverted to evil purposes, and the man is noted as one daring, headstrong, and selfish.

2. Again, Satan enters into one by nature gentle and affectionate. The easy, amiable man, yields to the persuasions of others bolder than himself. He does wrong to please *them*. He is a favourite among his companions. Alas! those qualities which should have endeared him to the servants of God, making him loving, obedient, and unselfish, become the goods of Satan, and serve *his* glorification.

3. A father's authority, become a possession of Satan, will be exercised either in cruelty towards his children, or in bringing them into subjection to the evil master whom he himself serves.

4. A mother's influence, so strong to lead her children in the way of holiness, may, under Satan's guidance, be equally strong to lead them, by the way of sin, to endless misery.

His armour is, first, armour of offence. He is a subtle spirit; he can enter secretly into the heart of man; he can spread before the imagination the glory of the world, the seductions of pleasure. He can command the services of wicked men, to lead the careless and thoughtless into the ways of sin.

Secondly, Satan has armour of defence, where-with he bars the entry of the Holy Spirit, when Jesus graciously knocks at the door of the deluded man's heart.

Careless indifference, thoughtlessness, proud resistance against God's Spirit, indolent procrastination, doubt, fear, and despair—these are some of the weapons wherein the evil one trusteth.

Are any of these, my brethren, found in you? Oh! who among us is free?

Let us, then, consider why Satan is strong?

First, He is by nature a being far more powerful than man. He was, before his fall, a higher creation; and though he has lost the beauty of holiness, the glory of love, and the majesty of truth, he still retains (by God's permission) a vast power: the power by which he overcame Adam and Eve in Paradise; the power by which he brought all his fiery darts against the Holy One in the wilderness—in vain!

Secondly. The subtle spiritual essence which the evil one possesses, constitutes him powerful. That he is able to enter in secretly and stir the hearts of men—to move their secret thoughts, and to take them unawares in the very citadel of their being—is a fearful exercise of power.

Thirdly. The control allowed to Satan over "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them" ("for that is delivered unto him"), both constitutes him powerful, and manifests his power.

Such is the strong man, such "his armour," such his might. What wonder, then, if he keep *his* goods in peace. What if he feel his dominion to be secure in the hearts of fallen men.

But oh! my brethren, *not for ever!* It is only until a Stronger than he shall come upon him and overcome him.

Terrible indeed is the might of Satan in heathen lands, where he and his angels are objects of worship. Yet even there he quails and trembles before the "Stronger One," who, by the voice of lonely missionaries, testifies to the truth, comes upon him, and, amid all the power and splendour of idol worship, puts him to shame. "WHO, then, is He that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save" (Isa. lxiii. 1). "Behold the Eternal Son, the Word and the Wisdom of God, by whom also He made the heavens." It is HE who goes forth into the wilderness, meets the strong man there, takes from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divides the spoils. The craving appetite of hunger (bread before Him, if only He will speak the word), He despises. The glory of the world, with all its kingdoms, takes no hold upon His imagination. The presumption of spiritual pride cannot touch His meek soul. "*Get thee behind me, Satan.*" He speaks with all authority, and the strong man flees, discomfited and shamed.

It is He again who, by the strange weapons of humiliation, suffering, and death, completes the victory, and takes from Satan his strongest weapon, in putting away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And that which in the wilderness, and on the cross, He did *for* us, He will also by His gracious power do *in* us.

If Satan be strong, the great Captain of our salvation is infinitely stronger. If Satan be by nature a creature more subtle, more crafty, more mighty, than man, He to whom we look for deliverance is more than a creature. He is God over all, blessed for ever, "of one substance with the Father." If by the penetrating power of his spiritual essence Satan can enter secretly into the heart, and suggest evil unawares, how much more marvellously can Christ enter by His Spirit into the very inmost recesses of our being; by His preventing grace inspire each holy thought, and by His assisting grace enable us to bring the same to good effect! Yes! He *will come upon him*, with more potent weapons: by unearthly fears, by earnest longings for a purer happiness than all the pleasures of sin can afford; by His word, written or preached; by the visitations of His providence; in answer to our prayers, and by "the means of grace," He *will overcome him*. Yes, as surely as in the wilderness, or on the cross. But it must be *with our coöperation*. He does not force freedom upon us. He gives us a choice, and enables us to choose. He shows us our

bondage, He promises freedom ; He breaks the bond of evil habits as we resist them. Then will Christ take from the evil one all his armour wherein he trusteth.

How can the allurements of the world have power to seduce the servant of Christ, when the glories of the kingdom are revealed ? What power can the objects of sense exercise over those who have seen the Lord, and have tasted how gracious He is ? Evil passions can have no power over that heart in which Jesus reigns by the mighty influence of *love*.

Lastly, " He divideth his spoils." He turns all the powers of mind and body to the service of God. Of our highest and purest affections, God Himself becomes the object. Our love, our reverence, our trust, are *in Him*. All special endowments are employed in doing good to His people, and promoting His cause.

Oh ! happy we, when we thus yield ourselves entirely to His most gracious influences ! How harmoniously, how tenderly, how surely, how effectually, He bends our wills and our affections to do Him loving service !

Cling, therefore, steadfastly and lovingly to Him, Who gave Himself for us, a sacrifice upon the cross, and by His almighty power overcame the wicked one.

The work of regeneration and renewal is most glorious, because it is the restoration of His own creatures to the great Creator.

THE VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE WORLDS.

ST. JOHN x. 14.

“ I am the Good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.”

THERE are times when God draws aside the veil which hides from us the unseen world, and we feel and know, as we do not feel and know at other times, what we really are, and where we stand. Then we feel how thin is the veil which separates what we *see* from what we *believe*. Then we realize that the *natural* world and the *spiritual* world are all one, and that there is one God over all.

When the servant of Elisha, the prophet of God, rose up early in the morning, he beheld the city compassed about with the horses and chariots of the king of Syria ; but when Elisha prayed, “ the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and, behold, the mountain was full of *horses and chariots of fire* round about Elisha.” When Jacob left his father’s house, sad in heart on leaving behind him all whom he loved, wondering perhaps how he

should ever escape the dangers of his journey and find his uncle's house; when, desolate and weary, he lay down to sleep with a stone for his pillow, God drew aside the veil, and he beheld a vision of angels—a ladder whose top reached to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. When Mary Magdalene stood beside the empty sepulchre on Easter Sunday morning, weeping, she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre, and saw two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. When Saul (afterwards called Paul) was journeying towards Damascus, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of Jesus, suddenly at midday there shined round about him a light from heaven brighter than the sun, and he fell to the earth and heard a voice—it was the voice of Jesus—saying unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"

For these, our fellow-mortals, some in sin and some in grace, the veil was drawn aside for a little while, and they were permitted to see into the world of spirits. God gave them an insight into that deeper and larger course of His dealings with the immortal spirits of men, which will hereafter be perfectly known and admired, with adoration and thanksgiving, by all those who love Him.

But even we, in our ordinary course of life, are not left without witness of those great realities which surround us. Though we do not see horses

and chariots of fire, nor angels with drawn swords, nor a ladder reaching up to heaven, nor a light above the brightness of the sun, yet God in His infinite mercy does allow us to look right through the veil, if not with our bodily eyes, yet by faith. *A solemn awe thrills through us; and we feel and know that GOD IS ALL IN ALL.* We stand upon the very edge of this life, and look forward into the endless ages of eternity.

Oh, happy they *who see in that eternity the boundless ocean of God's love!* To some the unseen life beyond the grave is dark, gloomy, and uncertain; the ocean is shrouded in a shadowy mist. Others, blessed be His name, can trace across the waves a pathway of light, brighter and brighter, as it draws nearer to the Sun above, the source of light.

But it is good for us all that we should thus look out beyond the world; and it is in tender mercy, the mercy of Divine wisdom, that God opens for awhile the eyes of our understanding; for, even if the prospect be dark and fearful, to *see it as it really is* may lead us to pray more earnestly for the true light, and rouse us to seek for it with all our hearts.

When suddenly there shined round about Saul the persecutor a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun, so that he fell to the earth, he rose up again blinded, needing some one to lead him by the hand; but when Ananias put his hand upon him there fell from his eyes, as it

had been scales, and he was filled with the Holy Ghost, and was baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Henceforth to him "*to live was Christ, to die was gain ;*" but "*to depart and to be with Christ was far better.*" The scales had fallen from his eyes, he was at peace with God through Jesus Christ, and he saw (though as yet only through a glass darkly) those things which he now knows with the fullness of a blessed experience.

So likewise is it in our measure with us. When God suddenly, by His awful dealings with us, or those about us, opens our eyes to see the true light, the very excess of light may make it dark ; but if we seek Him, through Jesus Christ, in humble obedience to His appointed means of grace, the scales will fall from our eyes, and we shall gaze with a calm abiding faith upon the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

I said that it was *good* for us that we should sometimes see into the world of spirits, as we cannot always see. But the *good* entirely depends upon whether the effect abides within us, and changes us into such as God would have us be.

To see death, and *know* that we must die ; to see the misery of departing without hope, the utter hopeless misery of those who carry with them a selfish and worldly heart beyond the grave ; to see, again, the calmness, the hope, the peace, the love, the quiet enduring confidence, the heavenly

wisdom, the pure joy, the heart united to Jesus, of those who leave us in His faith and fear; to see all this, and feel it all; to tremble in the awful terror of the one sight; to feel the kindling glow of hope and earnest desire, while we gaze upon the other, and *then to return to our everyday life, and be as we were before*; this is indeed to sear the conscience as with a hot iron. O may it not thus be with any of us!

Dear brethren, it need not be so, for the Good Shepherd is over all. He knows His sheep, and is known of them. All God's wondrous dealings with us, whether in providence or in grace, are meant to show us that we are known, *one by one*, to the Good Shepherd, and to help us to know Him even as we are known. All special revelations of that great world of spirits of which we form a part; all awful sights and thoughts which make us feel that God is dealing by His Spirit with each immortal soul, and leading on towards His own eternal presence those who trust Him and would fain love Him; all are intended to bring us nearer to Jesus; all are given as helps to enable us to talk of Him, and with Him, as we walk by the way, whether in sadness or gladness. The two disciples as they walked towards Emmaus talked of all that had happened, the betrayal, the trial, the death, the burial of Jesus, and His reported resurrection; and, as they reasoned together and were sad, *Jesus Himself drew near* and walked with them. He opened to them

the Scriptures, and made Himself known to them in breaking of bread. And when He had vanished out of their sight they knew that their hearts had burned within them by the way, as He talked to them and as He opened to them the Scriptures.

What we want is thus to walk the way of life with the Lord Jesus, He walking with us, and opening to us in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. We do not require visions of angels, nor will *occasional glimpses* of death or judgment, heaven or hell, avail us much alone; but what we require is, that while the Lord is in all our thoughts, about our path, and about our bed; while we so walk that He may walk beside us, our hearts should burn within us with a steady love for Him who gave Himself for us upon the cross, and gives Himself to us in the breaking of bread.

And, blessed be His love, it may be so for each of us, if we will. This sacred presence of the Lord is specially pledged to us in this holy paschal season. For this very end (among others) our blessed Lord abode for forty days upon the earth after His resurrection, that He might show us that this life and the life eternal are one. These blessed forty days are the visible links of that golden chain which binds the sacred life on earth of the elect unto the throne of God.

For Him who had conquered sin, Satan, and death; for Him who had clothed Himself in the garments of immortality, heaven was the proper

home; but He abode during this sacred season upon earth; He appeared to His disciples at various times, in various manners, He ate and drank before them, He breathed on them, He showed them His hands and His side, He taught them, and He blessed them. And why? To *show them* that although they were *in* the world, they were not *of* the world, but that He had chosen them out of the world to be His companions and friends, not merely in the days of His humiliation, but also now that He had put on His glorious apparel, and clothed Himself with strength. And, as if to show more plainly that He, even in His glory, was to be with them in all that they did and said and thought, He appeared unto them, not merely as they watched and wept beside His sepulchre, or as they were assembled together in solemn conclave, but as they walked by the way, or as they went a fishing.

By these most gracious acts of condescension the risen Lord *knits unto Himself* all true Christian hearts, even while they are still upon earth, and bids them to sanctify all their daily thoughts, words, and deeds, by the acknowledgment of His presence: "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. iii. 17).

Behold, then, O ye sheep of the fold, the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep! Fitly does the Church set Him before us, at *this season*, as our Good Shepherd, showing us thereby most plainly that though we are *upon the earth*

we are already the sheep of a *heavenly* fold, even as He, (though manifesting Himself to His disciples while they went about their worldly business, and eating and drinking before them,) *had already in heart ascended into that kingdom which was His proper home*, and where, in spirit, He continually abode by contemplation of His Father's glory, of which glory He was now made partaker in our nature. Fitly do we hear, during these marvellous forty days, His own most gracious words, "I am the Good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine."

For we *do* see Him during these forty days, not merely as the Good Shepherd ruling by the law of love over His *assembled* flock, but seeking them out one by one, showing His knowledge of their special wants and peculiar capabilities, and so leading them, one by one, to a more intimate knowledge of Him. He showed Himself to Mary Magdalene *alone*, the *comfort* of the mourner. He showed Himself to the two disciples on their journey to Emmaus, the *calmer* of their doubts, the unfolders of their perplexities, the end of their reasonings. He had a *special word* for Peter, binding him for ever to Himself in a love no longer self-confident and presumptuous, but reposing in His knowledge and His truth. He bestowed upon Thomas that which his heart so ardently craved, *sight* and *touch*, and so brought him to a confession of faith, which carried him through abundant

labours in Parthia, Media, and Persia, and finally to martyrdom in India.

Thus did He manifest Himself, after His resurrection, to each of these as the Good Shepherd, who knew His sheep, and therefore was more perfectly known of them. Thus during these forty days did He call His own sheep by name, and lead them out. These His loving-kindnesses are written *for our instruction*. He is still the Good Shepherd. When He ascended up on high He still manifested the same loving knowledge of each one of those sheep whom He had chosen, and drew each one to Himself, by those bonds of love, or chords of human affection, which He saw to be strongest in each heart. Still knowing His own sheep one by one, He poured the bright light upon Saul, opened gently the heart of Lydia, brought the Philippian jailor to humility and confession by terror, and instructed more perfectly (by the ministry of Priscilla and Aquila) Apollos, who was mighty in the Scriptures, as yet knowing only the baptism of John. By the influence of the Holy Spirit He associated Mark with the gentle and loving Barnabas, until his courage and heart were bold and strong enough to be profitable to the eager and earnest spirit of St. Paul, who had not thought it good to take him as a fellow-servant of their common Lord. So again He opened heaven, and showed Himself at the right hand of God, to encourage the *first* martyr to brave a cruel death. Thus, once more,

He revealed to the beloved disciple St. John, to him who had lain on His bosom at supper, visions of glory, which might have overwhelmed a spirit less loving, less calm, or less courageous.

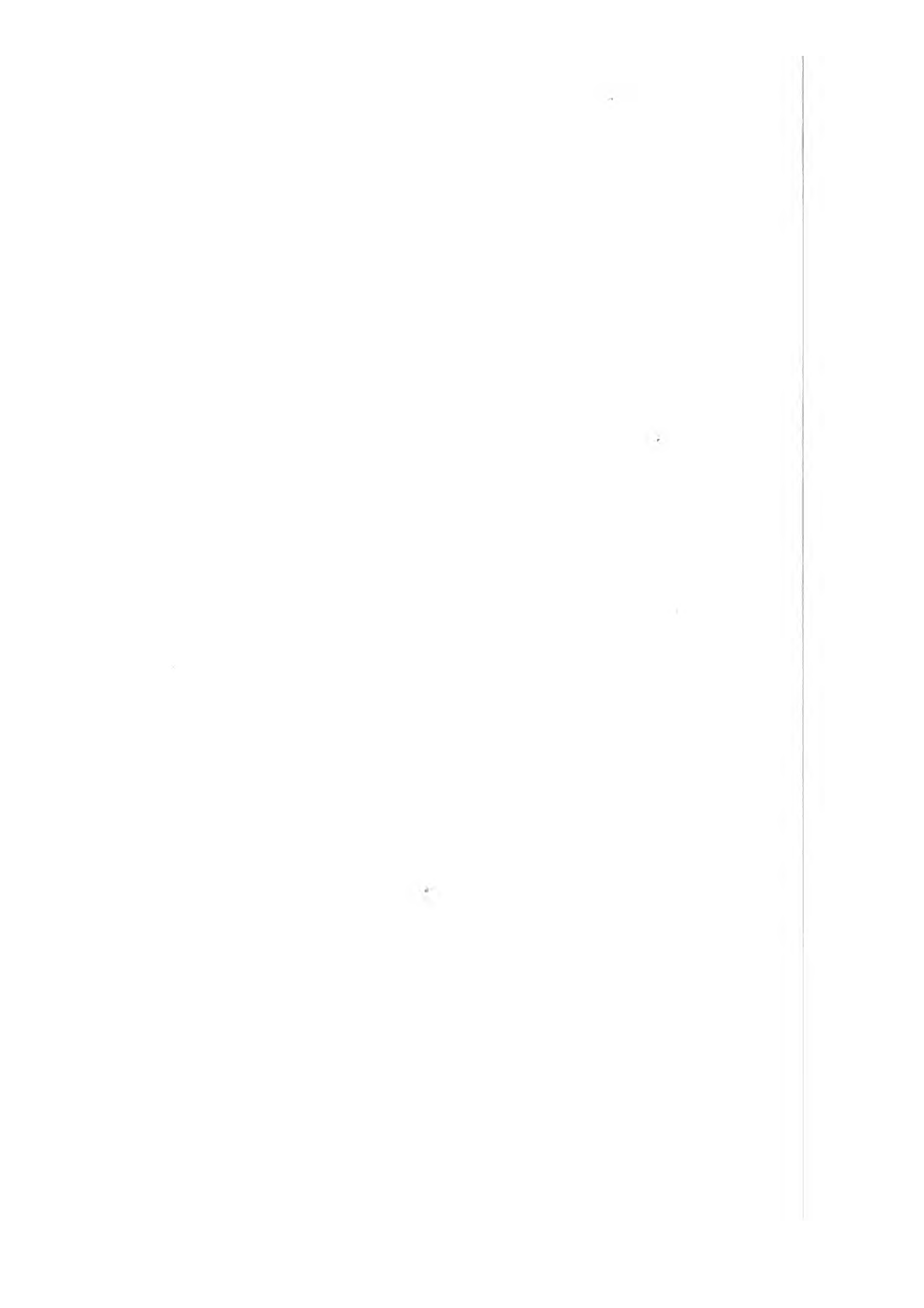
O then, let us seek our risen Saviour with full assurance of faith, for He will deal with each of us according to the same Divine compassion of perfect knowledge. He knows His sheep. He knows each one of us. He knows our weaknesses, our fears, our longings. He knows our past sins, our present blindness, our future trials. He knows *how long* we are to dwell in this world, and if our time be short He will fulfil in us His own work quickly, and cut it short in righteousness.

Should it be His will that our life be prolonged in this world, He will, if we earnestly seek Him, go with us through the heat of the day, bearing our burden with us, and for us; and, as evening closes in, He will abide with us until we see Him as He is.

Let us seek Him in His ordinances. To draw near to Him (after careful self-examination and much prayer) in the holy sacrament of His body and blood, is one most blessed means, and the highest granted to us, of holding communion with Him who is in heaven; it will help us more than any other means to carry about with us the conviction that we belong to a higher state of life than that we see around us, a conviction which will by the grace of His good Spirit secure our salvation; for,

as we feel that sin is present in our daily life, sin which binds men to the devil, whom they have never yet seen, so shall we know that righteousness is present, the righteousness of Christ, who is binding for us the strong man armed, and delivering our hearts from his devices.

Then may we go forth from our Church services, from the holy communion, from our daily prayers, into the daily walks of life, carrying Christ with us, as beings of another world, because we are learning to know Him as our Good Shepherd, Who knows us one by one as His beloved sheep, "Whom, having not seen, we love: in Whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory!" (1 Peter i. 8.)



THE CALMING OF THE TROUBLED HEART.

ST. JOHN xiv. 1—4.

“ Let not your heart be troubled : ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions : if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself ; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.”

THESE words, dear brethren, were words spoken to sorrowful hearts, and therefore may be understood by those who are in sorrow. *Their* sorrow was that He *was going* away ; *ours* is that the beloved one *is gone*. Their sorrow was full of doubt, perplexity, and fear. We also in our day of sorrow look forward in fear, lest more sorrows should come upon us. Oh ! happy are those who, when heavy sorrow (that tender grief under which the natural heart will bleed) comes upon them, are graciously spared all doubt, all terror. For them the sting of death is indeed taken away, and the wound of sorrow is soothed and healed by

2 THE CALMING OF THE TROUBLED HEART.

the balm of heavenly comfort. WHO then has taken away the sting of death? WHO has calmed and soothed the throbbing heart of His bereaved ones? HE WHO Himself hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He who Himself drank the cup of trembling to the dregs. He it is who, on the eve of His own passion, speaks to each believer in the time of sorrow, "*Let not your heart be troubled.*"

He sends the sorrow, and *He* gives the comfort. "He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up" (Hos. vi. 1).

Let us, then, lay hold upon the consolation set before us in these gracious words. Let us take them the more closely to ourselves as our hearts have been the more fitted by sorrow to receive them.

Observe, then, the loving words of consolation which the Divine teacher gives. They are not mere words of sympathy, which may comfort for the moment and then leave the heart blank and desolate, but they are words of power. They are *His* words *Who* spake as never man spake; and, rightly received, they convey to us a true, real, living comfort. They open out new vistas of everlasting, unchangeable joys, in the place of those temporal blessings which cheer us for awhile and are then taken away. A new and glorious prospect is set before us, and the Divine words bring the reality home to us. Even now we begin to realize the meaning of the Heavenly Bridegroom's

words, when He says, "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse:" the garden of the Lord, in which we are planted, and from which the faithful departed are not removed, but only transplanted to a brighter and more sheltered spot within its sacred walls.

Let us take a portion of these Divine words and dwell upon them more closely; search out their hidden stores of comfort, and make them our own by faith. They are words of power, as surely as they are words of consolation. He says, "*Let not your heart be troubled:*" for our Lord does not bid impossibilities, nor does He even command what is contrary to the better part of our nature. He does not forbid grief, for His sympathy with the mourner is too true! He does not say, Let not your heart be sorrowful: but, "*Let not your heart be troubled:*"* do not be torn, distracted, and tossed with doubt and dread.

1. To remove this doubt, to assuage this dread, to calm this disturbance, He points us to Himself, as our "*Saviour*, our God, our might in Whom we may trust," and our sure "refuge." "*Ye believe in God: believe also in Me.*" 'I am with you, ye see Me, ye know Me, I am human, I have tasted sorrow, I have known fear, and can be touched with a feeling of your infirmities;' "believe also in Me," 'as ye already believe in God the Father Almighty. Rest your faith on God manifest in the flesh. He is no longer far from you, shrouded

* *ταρασέσθω.*

4 THE CALMING OF THE TROUBLED HEART.

in the mystery of His sole Divinity, but near you, with you, in you.' "For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God *in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Cor. iv. 6).

2. And then He proceeds, "In my Father's house are many mansions." He had already said to His disciples, "Whither I go, ye cannot come." But this seeming banishment from His presence He had softened to St. Peter, by adding, "Whither I go thou canst not follow me *now*, but thou shalt follow me *afterwards*."

Now, to assure the hearts—not of Peter only, who had made the inquiry—but of all the rest of the doubting ones, He adds, "In my Father's house are many mansions:" abiding places for all, even for that "great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," which shall stand "before the throne and before the Lamb" (Rev. vii. 9). "If it were not so I would have told you." I would not have deceived you with false hopes of my continued presence. Had there not been room for every faithful disciple, "I would have told you."

3. And then (as if to reconcile them to the thought of parting with Him, a parting which they scarcely dared to face) He added, "I go to prepare a place for you." This too served to show them why they could not follow Him *now*.

It taught them a twofold, nay a threefold lesson. First, that it was necessary for Him to depart, that He might prepare them a place wherein they should abide with Him for ever. Secondly, that they could not follow Him at present; because, until He had overcome the sharpness of death, the kingdom of heaven could not have been opened to all believers—their place was not yet prepared; and, lastly, that it would be no strange, unknown, unsuitable place to which they were to go, but it would be one which must be the very place they needed, because HE was about to prepare it for them.

4. And then, still more to assure them that His going away was but for “a little while,” and that they were not to be separated from Him without the hope of finding Him again, He adds, “And if I go” (as go I must, though the frail flesh shrinks from the passage), “if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

The Good Shepherd does not leave His sheep to wander upon the mountains, or through the deserts where no way is—to find Him or not as chance directs,—but He comes again to find them and to guide them, or rather to take them to Himself, and hold them back by the bands of love from ever wandering again. And this His coming again is not a single act completed in a moment. He began to come again to His disciples at His

resurrection. He continued to revisit them when He sent His Spirit down on the Day of Pentecost (see vers. 16—18). *He returns to every elect soul when (at the hour which we call death) He comes and takes them from this world to be with Him in Paradise.* It was for this coming that St. Paul was longing when he had “a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Phil. i. 23). But his final coming will be at the last day. Then those who wait for His appearance will *lift* up their heads, *for their redemption draweth nigh.*

5. Finally, He adds, “*And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.*” He speaks to them as if they already knew what they were very soon to know under His teaching. He says, “*Ye know,*” not because they had realized their knowledge; for one of them immediately answered, speaking for all, “Lord, we know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way?” but He said it because they *ought* to have known. The knowledge lay hidden within them, as the perfect plant is in the seed; but it needed reflection and faith to bring it out, and therefore He helped their unbelief, and quickened their slowness of heart by telling them, “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.*” Thus He makes known to them both the “Way” and the “End,”—*Himself* the Way, *His Father* the End, to whom He Himself was going, and beneath whose footstool He would gather the whole body of His elect.

And surely, dear brethren, while thus comforting His disciples, the Heavenly Teacher comforts us also under all our trials, but especially under those trials which most resemble the sorrow of His disciples. When those we love are taken from us by death, a blank and dreary void is left in the natural heart. The separation seems to our untaught spirit so complete, so hopeless, that we can do nothing but bewail the love, the brightness, the beauty, and the grace which seem to be lost to us for ever.

How calm, then, how soothing, how full of glorious hope, fall those gracious words upon the wounded spirit, "*Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God: believe also in ME. In My Father's house are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . . and whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.*"

Yes, blessed be His name, we do know. We know that He has gone to His Father, and our Father. We know that in that glorious house He has prepared a place for His elect. And since there are many abiding places there (each one suited to the needs of each whom He has chosen and called and known), there is room for *our* beloved ones. "*I will come again,*" He says to His bereaved disciples, "*and take you to Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.*" In those who are earliest taken the gracious promise is first fulfilled.

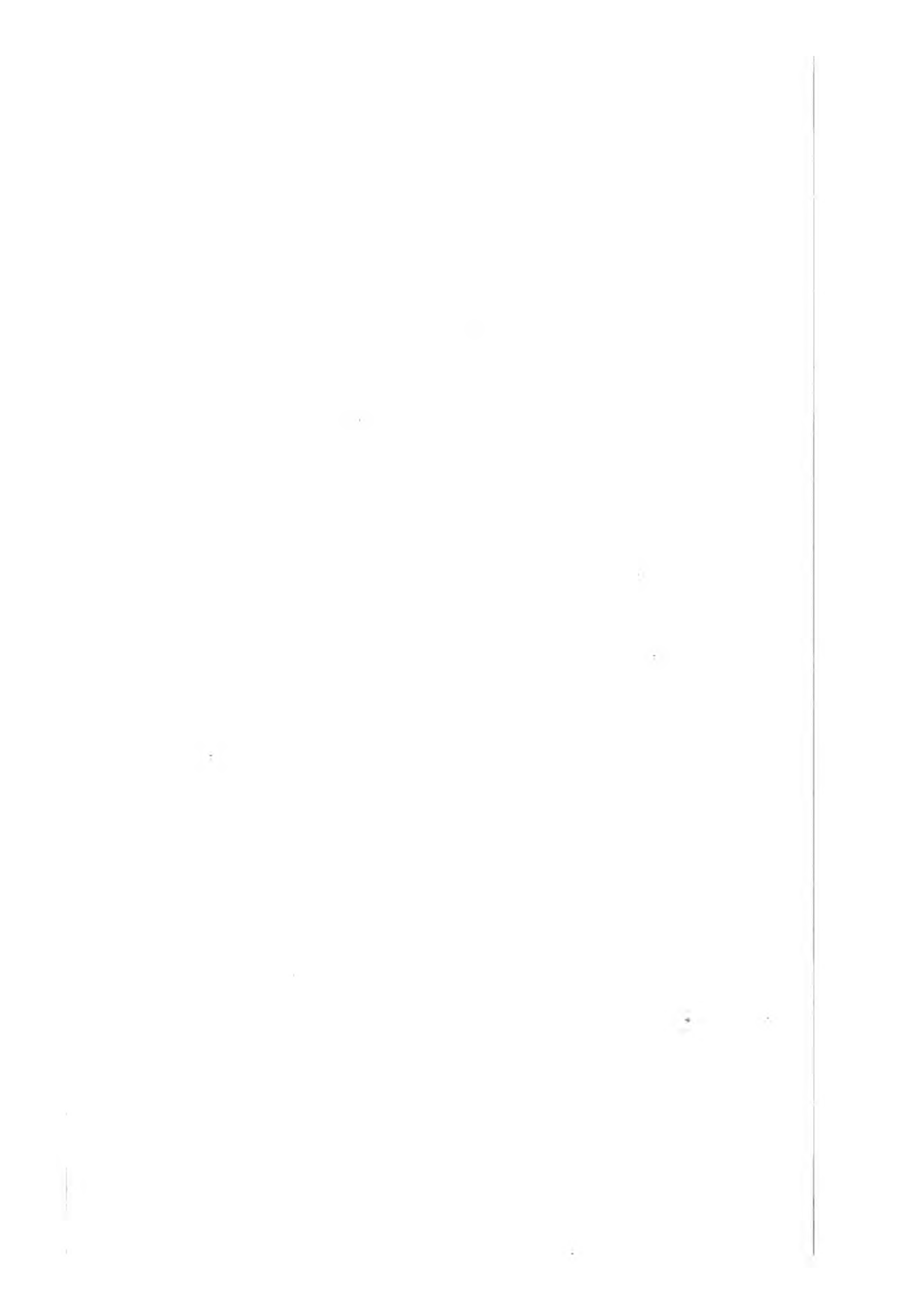
He comes! He comes to a village, or He

comes to a family, and He chooses whom He will. He takes perhaps the choicest lamb of all the flock; *it is rightly HIS*, and to HIM we must freely yield it. He selects, if it so please Him, the most loving, the brightest, the most confiding, the loveliest. He only takes for the heavenly mansions that spirit which is best fitted to abide there. Whither HE has entered in, thither He takes unto Himself the soul that is stayed in God; and, blessed be His name, whither He has taken His elect we know, and we know the way. What place, then, is there for trouble, distraction, or tossing to and fro of heart? For those who are departed in the faith of Christ (and most certainly for those little ones whom He so tenderly loves and cares for) there is the unspeakable joy of His presence, who is the very life itself. For those who are left behind there is Christ, the way, by which we too may pass into the same sure abiding place, the highway of which the prophet speaks: "*An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein*" (Isa. xxxv. 8).

To look more steadfastly to the glorious end, to see more plainly than ever the all-sufficiency of the eternal bliss, this should be the first result of God's taking to Himself the souls of our beloved ones. And the second result should be to steady our footsteps along the narrow way of holiness, to

make us look more carefully for the footprints of the blessed Jesus, that we may walk therein, for this is practically to walk by Him as "the Way." Then shall we, as our faith increases, learn that He is in another sense the *Way*, by whom alone we have access to the Father, in that *through* Him alone, for His only merits, and for His dear name's sake, can we be accepted and admitted into the presence of God. Thus it is that, knowing Him as the Way, both as an example and as the Mediator, the redeemed walk thereon. It is by this Way that "*the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall be done away*" (Isa. xxxv. 10).

May we be found among that blessed company, for His name's sake, to whom we trust ourselves; and oh! may those whom we love as ourselves be there also.



THE WILL OF CHRIST.

ST. JOHN xvii. 24.

“ Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am ; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me : for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world.”

IN all Holy Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit, this chapter is in its wording the simplest ; in its meaning the deepest. It is the prayer offered by Jesus on behalf of those whom God had given to Him ; given before the foundation of the world ; given, because He was beloved from eternity by the Father. He might have prayed in *silence* ; but He prays audibly, that while He shows Himself to be our intercessor, He may also be our teacher.

“ The hour was come,” the hour appointed by the Father ; therefore He said, “ Father, glorify Thy Son ” (through death, in Resurrection), “ that Thy Son also may glorify Thee.”

What mere creature could have so spoken ? Who but He who came down from heaven, and

Who was co-equal with His Father, could have dared to complete that which the everlasting Father began—"As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh," "that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him." "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." To know, to love, to enjoy the infinite is eternal life. His tender care for His own had already been manifested; and now He prays that it may be completed; and then, in the twentieth verse, He passes on to those "who shall believe" on Jesus, through the words of His disciples; and so, dear brethren, the intercession of the Great High Priest has come down to us, and to ours. We, therefore, and ours, are included in the glorious prayer uttered in the twenty-first and following verses, "That they also may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me" (John xvii. 21—23).

Again the Father's name is uttered; but simply, not "*my* Father," but "Father" only. Three times already had Jesus invoked that holy Name,

that Name in which the mystery of redemption is summed up.

In the first verse, He "lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, FATHER, the hour is come, glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee."

In the fifth verse He prays, "Now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was."

In the eleventh verse He pleads, "Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as we are." And so we come to the words of the text—

"Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world."

"Father, I will."* What, then, is that WILL? Jesus answers, "That which Thou hast given Me;" not "*whom*," but "that *which*." That for which He willed was, that the whole Church, with all its faithful members, should be one glorious gift to Him, including every faithful member of His mystical body:—the little ones newly baptized, the younger members called early to the bosom of the Good Shepherd; the tried servant of God, called away in the heat of the day; the aged saint, ripe "to enter into rest."

* *θέλω.*

For these, as given to Him, Jesus says, "*I will;*" it is My claim. What, then, does He will? He answers, "That where I am," in the glorified state, "there shall also my servant be" (John xii. 26). The like assurance was given, as He drew nearer to His passion—"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John xiv. 3). "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts ii. 39).

Enoch and Elijah, in the Transfiguration, were with Him as *single persons*; they were with Him in His glory; but the glory of Christ was not yet complete, because it was *not continuous*. Not until the glorification of His members was accomplished could His glory shine forth in all its effulgence. His absolute will was not perfectly accomplished until His desire be satisfied—to have His people, *all His people, with Him*.

Day by day, from the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, the saints departed taste the bliss of paradise, yet they still desire the fulness of bliss. "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. vi. 10). "They rest yet a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled" (Rev. vi. 11).

Jesus has indeed ascended into the heavens, yet He still longs "to see His people with Him in glory." He does indeed enjoy the fulness of the beatific vision now, but He will then have the fulness of the body mystical. The Church, His Body, is called "His fulness." God "hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head of all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Ephes. i. 22, 23). His glory, therefore, will be perfect "when He shall come to be glorified in ALL His saints" (2 Thess. i. 10).

To you also, dear brethren, and to your children, is the promise sure, if we seek it with our whole hearts. It is His will, that where HE is, we also shall be with Him. Our one great privilege here below is to be with Christ in heart; but we also long to be with Him more gloriously when, through the grave and gate of death, we shall have entered into the unseen world. For so He passes on to the next step—"That they may see My glory." *To see His glory is the fulness of bliss*; to see His glory, not as mere gazers, but as partakers. For "when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John iii. 2), fulfilling the promise spoken on the eve of His agony, "A little while, and ye shall not see Me; and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, and, because I go to the Father" (John xvi. 17).

Man, fallen man, has a capacity of misery and

of bliss exceeding that of the lower creatures. To man has been given memory and anticipation: he has a consciousness of guilt, and *more*, he has self-condemnation; and finally, to him alone despair is possible. Yet there is still a greater misery; greater in *redeemed* man, because *his* fall from righteousness is deeper, and the contrast is more terrible.

But, thanks be to God, there is also in man a greater capacity of bliss. He can cherish the memory of mercies vouchsafed, of goodness freely bestowed, and love ineffable.

Again, man has the power of anticipation, not to be disappointed, if rightly guided; and hope, given not in vain; and, in that conscience of right has been given to him, he can recognize God's approving voice.

Above all, man, regenerate man, can receive the love of God, and can love Him for His love. "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. iii. 18). And what is that glory? Jesus Himself describes it: "The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me. Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory,

which Thou hast given Me: for thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John xvii. 22—24). This glory is the gift of the Father to our Divine Lord in His humanity, given to Him as "the Son of Man," foreseen, fore-ordained. "Therefore," He says, "doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life for the sheep." This love He earned by His obedience. This glory He received as the gift of the Father's love. Of this love and this glory He wills that we should share.

Oh, my brethren, it is a glorious hope. If we cherish it, how can any earthly trouble hurt us? Why mourn for those who have gone before if they have departed in the faith?

The hearts even of the little ones are fitted for the bliss of heaven; nay more, for "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God has perfected praise." Therefore He takes them to Himself to sing in paradise. What is more beautiful upon earth than Christian children singing with heart and voice, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost"? How much more glorious then will those aspirations be when sung in paradise.

Why, then, should we be cast down by the hardships of the journey for ourselves? Are they for a moment to be compared with the never-ending bliss of heaven? The Queen of Sheba thought it happiness to stand before Solomon, to hear his wisdom; what, then, will it be to stand before God Almighty, and see His glory?

Abigail thought it an honour to be but David's handmaid to wash his servants' feet. What, then, will it be to wait upon God, and to "behold His face," not in vision only, as did the prophets, but face to face; to know Him, to love Him, and to be beloved by Him?

To know the Father's power, to partake of the Son's wisdom, to receive the Holy Spirit's goodness, to behold the incomparable beauty, the unutterable majesty, the inconceivable glory of the Holy Trinity in unity!

To see God is the reward of the pure in heart. That all His true disciples should share that reward is the will of Christ. "Father, I WILL that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world."

O God, Who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

THE DOUBLE SEAL,
OR,
THE FIRM FOUNDATION.

2 TIMOTHY ii. 19.

“The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”

“God’s firm foundation standeth:” what then is that foundation? Theodore says that it is “*the foundation of truth*:” St. Ambrose, “*The promises of God.*” Some have thought that the foundation is Christ; others have held that it is the Christian religion; others, again, “that it is the Church founded by God, ‘built upon the apostles and prophets,’” “Jesus Christ Himself the chief corner-stone.”

Hammond renders *θεμέλιον*, “a bond,” or “bill,” or “compact” (as in 1 Tim. vi. '19), having a seal affixed with two inscriptions, one on each side, for the two parties to the bond: on God’s side, “*The Lord knoweth them that are His,*” and

on man's side, "*Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*" Having this seal, or inscription—"The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. xxi. 14), the "seal" or inscription indicating ownership.

(1) "The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. ii. 19), and, "If any man love God, he is known of Him:" and (Gal. iv. 9), "Ye have known God, or rather are known of Him:" and Num. xvi. 5, "The Lord will shew who are His, and who is holy."

(2) On the other hand, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." "Depart ye, depart ye," saith the prophet; "go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isa. lii. 11). And St. John echoes the cry, "I heard a voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev. xviii. 4).

Observe, that in the Old Testament the words are, "Be ye clean that *bear the vessels* of the Lord;" but St. Paul, though he is addressing a bishop, uses the words, "*Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity*" (2 Tim. ii. 19). Why, therefore, is every one that nameth the name of Christ bound to depart from iniquity? Because they "that bear the vessels of the Lord" must "be *clean.*" But St. Paul, though address-

ing a bishop, does not confine his exhortation to bishops and priests: He says, "Let *every one* that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." And why? Because "Christ hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father" (Rev. i. 6).

We have, then, before us a foundation-stone, sealed with two mottoes, one on the one side, the other on the opposite. The eye of man cannot grasp the whole of solid bodies at once. To ascertain their shape we refer to former experience. If you happen to see a form which is unlike any that you have hitherto met with, you handle it, and examine it; you look at it from several points of view; and when you are satisfied as to its *form*, you weigh it, to ascertain whether it is hollow or solid.

The same principle applies to our ordinary practical life. The man of business is careful in his expenditure; but if he sees the way to secure a richer result he spends freely. In the discipline of children, a wise father, while he punishes the disobedient children, tempers justice with mercy.

Even in the declaration of Divine truth revealed by the Holy Ghost, the same principle holds good.

Truth is one before God All-seeing; but to frail man truth cannot be conveyed except by learning here a little and there a little. Almost all, if not absolutely all, heresies are one-sided truths.

To the Divine covenant there are two seals: but alas! man is apt to be satisfied with one

Jesus says, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him" (John vi. 44); therefore some will say, "It is useless to try." Again, St. Paul says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;" therefore others will say, "I must save myself," forgetting that "it is God which worketh in you to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. ii. 12, 13).

Again, there are those who say, "The Lord knoweth them that are His;" therefore, if I am elect, I shall be saved, however I live: but God gives the second motto, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity;" and, "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. xii. 14).

Oh, then, let us beware of the miserable deception, the blind presumption, of explaining away any of God's sayings, because *we* cannot reconcile them with some other of His laws. God *can* reconcile them if we cannot.

But even we may, with patient thought, see that there is no real contradiction in the way in which God conveys His precepts to frail man. Let us then take the words of the text, and try to find their exact force. First, "The Lord knoweth them that are His." He knows who is sincere, who is really trying to do the will of God. On the other hand, He knows who are only making a pretence, and who are deceiving themselves.

But God sees the entire course of each indi-

vidual soul ; HE knows who will fall away, and who will persevere unto the end : for all time is, to Him, one eternal Now.

It is an awful thought that one patient eye sees our every thought, and word, and deed, even the most sinful ; or, on the other hand, how great a blessing it is that HE sees every deed of mercy, and every victory over temptation.

But God's foreknowledge in no way binds our free-will. It is indeed a thought to humble us before His all-seeing eye ; but it should not therefore make us indifferent, nor should it lead us to despair. " Work out (therefore) your own salvation with fear and trembling : for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure " (Phil. ii. 12, 13). He willeth no man's fall. " Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die ? saith the Lord God : and not that he should return from his ways, and live ? " (Ezek. xviii. 23).

No man, therefore, *need* fall away ; and certainly none will perish, if he set himself resolutely to work out his salvation, leaning on the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

As surely as God knoweth them that are His, so will those who depart from iniquity be sealed for life eternal.

The grace of God, His foreknowledge, and His election, are all upon the side of him who girds himself to the battle, who fights the good fight of faith, and by the grace of God lays hold upon

eternal life. If you depart from iniquity you draw near to God ; if you touch not the unclean thing, you are embraced in the arms of God's infinite mercy ; if you close your eyes to the allurements of the world, *God sees for you*. Your heavenly Father leads you in the path of holiness, and in His good time He enlightens your eyes to see the King in His beauty. God knows His faithful servant, and "is known of him."

Learn, therefore, dear brethren, the safe lesson of earnest endeavours, combined with sure trust in God's goodness. Some may look upon you as a hypocrite, others may say that you are not converted, or that you are not one of the elect. But God sees you as you are. If you are resisting temptation ; if you are trying to amend your faults ; if you are praying earnestly for the grace of God's Holy Spirit, God, your heavenly Father, is setting His seal upon you. He knows you, and He loves you as His own child ; He will not let you fall away ; He will keep you as the apple of His eye ; and, above all, He will give you the crowning grace of perseverance. He is not a hard master, "reaping where He has not sown," or "gathering where He has not strawed." Every good desire, every sigh of penitential sorrow, every humble confession, every earnest resolution, is His gift. He will crown His own gifts. "To this man will I look," saith the Lord, "even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word" (Isa. lxvi. 2). If, therefore, men

are hard upon you, take refuge in God's infinite loving-kindness. "The merciful goodness of the Lord endureth for ever and ever upon them that fear Him, even upon such as *keep His covenant*, and think upon His commandments to do them" (Ps. ciii. 17, 18).

CHRIST'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE HEART OF MAN

SEEN IN HIS SYMPATHY WITH THE DOUBTS
AND FEARS OF HIS DISCIPLES.

ST. JOHN xvi. 24—30.

“Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in My Name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father; and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said unto Him, Lo, now speakest Thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that Thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask Thee. By this we believe that Thou camest forth from God.”

MAN is so constituted, that he is influenced, not by his reason only, but by his affections, and even

more powerfully by that tender sympathy which is freely offered by those who have themselves passed through trials and sorrows, and can therefore be touched with the feeling of the infirmities of others.

This loving sympathy is a marked feature of the Bible. It can be traced page by page from Genesis to Revelation. It is most strikingly manifested in the intercourse of Christ with His disciples, and in the tenderness with which He comforted the sorrowful, healed the sick, and forgave repentant sinners, as they (one and all) laid their miseries before Him. Nor did He send them out again into the world, to wallow in the mire of sin. He raised them above the world, and gave them power to live henceforth a higher and purer life.

This knowledge of the heart of man ; this tender sympathy with all his necessities ; this power of healing, and comforting, and ennobling fallen men, found in Holy Scripture, constitutes its fitness to be the guide and stay of fallen creatures.

It is far from clear, at first sight, how it was that the disciples expressed themselves satisfied with our Lord's answer to the question that they had so anxiously discussed. It was not because they understood His words : "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world : again I leave the world, and go to the Father." They said, indeed, "*Now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb,*" which was true. Yet the

plain words, in the course of their fulfilment, were darker to them than any proverb. They believed; but their faith was not that firm faith which is built upon the rock of truth. Jesus answered them: *Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every one to his own, and shall leave Me alone*" (John xvi. 31).

In reply to their unuttered doubts about the meaning of His statement, "*A little while and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while and ye shall see me*"—(ver. 16), Jesus had not explained the meaning of His words, but He *had pointed out* what would be the effect upon the disciples of those words, in their fulfilment.

Their faith, therefore, was confirmed, not because all was really plain, not because they had followed the sense of those words of wisdom, *but because the disciples had felt the deep tenderness which breathed in every accent of that loving voice; because in every phrase, mysterious though it were, there shone forth a clear knowledge of the inmost yearnings of their hearts.*

"Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him" (ver. 19). Feeling for their distressing perplexities, He promised that a day should come when they need ask Him nothing, for they would know, even as they were known. He assured them of their share of the Father's love—" *The Father Himself loveth you*" (ver. 27).

He also acknowledged the genuineness of their

love and their faith, in spite of their doubts and ignorance. "*Because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God*" (ver. 27).

And then He added the clear and simple words, "*I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father*" (ver. 28), responding to the wish of their hearts for full information, as far as it was possible to respond at that time:—*using words which would be clear to them when the Holy Ghost should bring to their remembrance whatsoever Jesus had said unto them.*

IT WAS BY THIS SYMPATHIZING KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR INMOST THOUGHTS THAT JESUS RULED THE HEARTS OF HIS DISCIPLES.

His deep and tender sympathy drew forth their affections: His perfect knowledge inspired them with confidence.

We see this principle in all our Lord's dealings with those whom He would draw to Himself. When Nathanael, the guileless Israelite, approached Him, full of doubt, asking: "*Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?*" he was converted by the simple words, "*When thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee*" (John i. 48).

Why did this convert him? No doubt because the words of Jesus touched some chord of love, or fear, or hope, which had vibrated in his heart under the breath of God's Holy Spirit.

When Zaccheus, moved by curiosity, mingled with deeper feelings, climbed up into the sycamore

tree, to see Jesus passing by, the ordinary words, "*Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house*" (Luke xix. 5), brought salvation to him and his. Why? because they showed Christ's knowledge of his inmost thoughts, and sympathy with his secret longings.

So also was it with St. Peter, rising from his fall, and seeking, with a trembling heart, to regain his Lord's affection and confidence:—*that which bound him* for ever to his risen Saviour, was perfectly expressed in the words of love and admiration. "Lord, *Thou knowest* all things; *Thou knowest* that I love thee" (John xxi. 17).

So, perhaps, it was with St. Paul, when the Lord spoke to him from heaven: "Saul, Saul, why persecuted thou Me? . . . it is hard to kick against the pricks" (Acts ix. 4, 5). Zealous as he was for the law, which he had studied for years at the feet of Gamaliel, satisfied (as he believed himself to be) that in persecuting the Christians he was "doing God service," there is little cause for doubt that his conscience had not been altogether silent:—some secret doubts had occurred to him: remorse had touched his heart, and the words of Divine knowledge found an echo therein.

So also, again, with St. Augustine of Hippo, also under a fig-tree; the awful and long-continued struggle between evil habits and nobler longings—a struggle which had racked his whole being for many months, ended suddenly in the entire victory of truth and purity over delusion and self-

indulgence, as he read the words, "*Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof*" (Rom. xiii. 14). This was the answer to his bitter cry, "*How long, Lord, how long?*"

In all these instances the word was a word of *sympathy*, founded upon *perfect knowledge of the heart*.

And, Is not this mysterious sympathy of heart with heart the secret of all influence for good amongst mankind?

Whether we would teach men knowledge, or lead them on to a nobler course of life, or stir them up to accomplish some glorious deed, or help them to overcome the stubbornness of a determined will, we *must know the heart with which we have to deal*. We must ourselves be touched with a fellow-feeling for the most secret movements of the soul that we would influence for good.

WHENEVER THIS UNION OF SYMPATHY, AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE HEART, IS FOUND PERFECT, it is *the token of God's presence*. The word which combines them in full measure is *the word of God*.

Let us apply this rule to the Holy Bible, which, thanks be to God, many of us have known from our early childhood. Let us put the holy sayings of that sacred Book alongside of our own experience of life. Let us see how our most secret wants and trials, our most cherished hopes, our most thrilling fears, are there met, known, and felt for as we shall never find elsewhere.

That is God's word, which speaks to the heart's necessities.

1. Are we perplexed at the strange incongruities between *right as a law*, impressed upon us by the Author of our nature, and *wrong-doing, as a fact*, both in the world around us, and alas! in ourselves also? Are we oppressed by the great mystery of evil in the world, while we feel that *good* is the first, and ought to be predominant?

This perplexing incongruity is dealt with *in the Bible*, as it is *nowhere else*. There we read that "God made man upright," and gave him perfect freedom to choose the good, and refuse the evil—but that, in the exercise of his freedom, man chose the evil, and refused the good.

This is far indeed from *explaining* the great mystery of the origin of evil; *but it accounts for it in such a way as to answer perfectly to the actual facts of human life*: and yet, at the same time, it encourages those aspirations after a perfect restoration of that Divine Image in which man was originally made; and nothing short of that restoration can satisfy the mind, and heart, and soul, and conscience of the man who longs to be reconciled to God.

2. Are we conscious of the need of mercy?—and burdened with the sense of guilt? Do we seek an assurance that mercy to the penitent is possible?

O how large, and free, and gracious are the promises of Holy Scripture! "There is mercy with Thee,

therefore shalt Thou be feared" (Ps. cxxx. 4.)
 " *Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more* (Heb. viii. 12). " *Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool*" (Isa. i. 18). " *Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness*" (Neh. ix. 17). " *Like as a father pitieth his own children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.*" " *Look how wide also the east is from the west; so far hath He set our sins from us*" (Ps. ciii. 13).

And yet this free and full forgiveness is coupled with a deep detestation of sin, and a full sense of the degradation and misery of the sinner.

The Lord is "of purer eyes than to behold evil," He cannot "look upon iniquity" (Hab. i. 13). " *He will by no means clear the guilty*" (Exod. xxxiv. 7). " *A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land*" (Jer. v. 30).

Where else, excepting in the Bible, or in the writings of those who have made the Bible their study, will you find this *union* of a deep hatred of sin, with the promise of free pardon for the penitent sinner? Here alone "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other!" (Ps. lxxxv. 10).

3. There is not a nation under heaven in which there is not found some trace of the great doctrine of sacrifice. That awful question (put forth by the prophet Micah) embodies the fears and hopes of the entire fallen race. " *Wherewith shall I come*

before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Mic. vi. 6, 7).

The immediate answer avails to soothe the anguish of the heart, without fully satisfying the craving of the understanding:—"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. vi. 8).

The way of obedience is the way of peace. The need of a real sacrifice is not denied: the troubled heart is bid to rest in God, and in due time the fuller revelation will be given. And when it comes, oh! how glorious it is! How completely is the yearning heart satisfied!

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John i. 29). "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John ii. 1, 2). "The blood of Christ" the "Son" of God, "cleanseth us from all sin."

4. Are we from time to time perplexed with doubt, by the claims of conflicting duties? The scrupulous conscience is met by the promise: "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying,

This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isa. xxx. 21).

And the disciples of Christ are comforted with the assurance that they should not be left without a guide, when He was removed from them. He tells them that, "*When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He shall guide you into all truth*" (John xvi. 13).

5. Are we oppressed by the immeasurable distance between the Infinite and the finite, the creature and the Creator, we read, "*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth*" (John i. 14). "*God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son*" (Heb. i. 1). "*Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but 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*" (Philip. ii. 6—8).

The incarnation of the eternal Son; His infinite condescension, His deep humiliation, revealed in the written word, have bridged over the awful gulf which separates the Great I AM from man, the creature of a day, whose natural life is "gone like a shadow, and withered like grass" (Ps. cii. 11).

6. Again : Do we shrink with dread from the unseen world, into which we are to pass by the gates of death? Is it a sore trial of faith and constancy that we have to pass away from all familiar objects—to leave behind us home and kindred, friends and acquaintances, occupations and amusements, and then to go away desolate, to a land where all is strange, untried, and perhaps uncongenial? O how consoling is the promise of our Saviour: "*I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also*" (John xiv. 2, 3). He knows our love for home: He will not leave us homeless. He is gone (and He tells us that He has gone) *expressly* to prepare a place for us; that place which is our only secure and lasting home—for HE is there.

7. Once more: Have we been called upon to pass through the fiery trial of sore bereavement, the grief which rends the heart above all other griefs, the loss of those dear ones, dearer than our own life? The father, the main pillar of the house; the tender and loving mother; the true wife, that doubled all our joys, and softened all our sorrows; the bright happy children, whose faces lighted the dwelling-place of love—sunshine to-day, to-morrow darkness overshadowing the homestead; for, in one room lies the pale, calm form; that angel face, soon to be laid in the grave, to be seen no more in this world!

What consolation can the world afford in the deep sorrows of humanity? What eye can look down into the grave of the beloved one without fear, and dread, and hopeless misery, unless we have a blessed assurance of a better home, the home of homes, which is never broken up.

The Bible bids us not to sorrow, as others which have no hope: "*For, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him*" (1 Thess. iv. 14). It turns our eyes towards that Holy City where "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying" (Rev. xxi. 4).

8. Lastly: Have we experienced the awful struggle between good and evil in our own lives? Have we tried earnestly to subdue the evil, and to do the good. Have we found it to be like the cutting off of the right hand, or the plucking out of the right eye? See how the awful contest is described by the Apostle Paul; "*I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am!*" (Rom. vii. 21—24). Who ever felt this misery more keenly than did St. Paul, as he cried, "*Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*" (or, "*from this body of death.*")

Was ever any one more fully conscious of his own weakness than the noble apostle? And yet it was no barren sympathy that he offered to his readers. The struggle is to end in perfect victory—“*I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Rom. vii. 25); and again in the following chapter: “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death*” (Rom. viii. 1, 2).

Whatever be the secret grief, doubt, fear, or anxiety, which lies heavily upon the conscience or the heart, Jesus knows it—and he feels for it, for He has borne the burden. Those who believe in Him, who trust in Him, who see in Him the Father's tender love, have found the pearl of great price.

Thousands have lived a life of purity, patience, and lovingkindness; have visited the sick, have comforted the mourners, have faced the deadly pestilence, have rescued from the pit of corruption the fallen outcast, themselves untainted by the atmosphere of impurity—sustained by the grace given them through Him who came down to seek and to save those that were lost.

(1) The Bible deals with the mystery of the origin and prevalence of evil. *It tells us that man was made upright*, but left free to choose the good or to refuse the evil.

(2) Upon his fall, man, groaning under the burden of guilt, yearned for restoration ; conscious of the need of mercy : *The free and gracious promise of pardon is given.*

(3) Humanity has ever felt the deep need of atonement :—Behold, in Scripture, “ *The Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world !* ”

(4) The trial of the scrupulous conscience, wavering between conflicting duties, is met by the promise of guidance from above.

(5) The awful gulf that separates the finite from the Infinite, *is bridged over by the Incarnation.*

►(6) The terrors of death are stilled by the promise : “ *I go to prepare a place for you.* ”

(7) In all our deepest trials and sorrows, we have the blessed assurance, “ *Thy brother shall rise again.* ”

(8) And, once more, we find in Holy Scripture the promise of *victory in the great personal conflict against evil.*

All this (and far more, for those who will seek it) is contained in the Bible ; which therefore is God's word, because *none but the all-seeing and all-merciful, to whom all hearts be open, and all desires known, could so have ministered to our deepest necessities, and calmed our fears.*

This is a personal assurance of the truth of God, as seen in His word, which sets the seal to all external testimony. Before experience we rely on witnesses, like the Samaritans, who accepted the

testimony of the woman who said, "*He told me all that ever I did.*" After experience, we may say with the same Samaritans: "*Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ the Saviour of the world* (John iv.).

Thousands there are, labouring men, artisans, men of profound science, keen, clever men of business, men exalted high in station above their fellows, all of whom have bowed before the cross, and have learnt to say, we "*have tasted that the Lord is gracious*" (1 Pet. ii. 3). We can exclaim with the Psalmist, "*How sweet are Thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth*" (Ps. cxix. 103).

Prize, then, these blessed tokens of the *truth* of God's holy word, and look for more.

In this pre-eminently is the promise sure, "TO HIM THAT HATH SHALL BE GIVEN."

The doctrines of our holy faith are so closely knit together that the knowledge of one leads on naturally to the understanding of the rest. Divine truth has *one* source, the God of all truth, who is one and undivided: and the revelation of Divine truth is adapted to the unity of our manhood. If a single chord of the heart vibrates to the breath of Divine truth, our whole being will respond in full tones of sweetest harmony.

"*Ask, and it shall be given unto you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*"

16 CHRIST'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE HEART.

The promise is sure. It is the voice of Him who "*spake as never man spake.*" It is **His** promise, *who knows us better than we know ourselves, and who feels for us, as tenderly as he knows us intimately.*

THE OBSERVANCE OF ASCENSION.

ST. JOHN vi. 62.

“ What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before ? ”

[ἐὰν οὖν θεωρήτε.]

MANY of those who listened to the teaching of Jesus, as recorded in this chapter, were sorely *offended*.

When He said of Himself, “ I am the Bread of Life : he that cometh to Me shall never hunger ; and he that believeth on Me, shall never thirst,” they murmured at Him : and, as He unfolded the great mystery more clearly, the Jews strove among themselves, saying, “ How can this man give us His flesh to eat ? ”

Even many of His disciples said, “ This is an hard saying ; who can hear it ? ” Jesus knew that His disciples murmured at it, and He asks them, “ Does this offend you ? ” and then He lays before them a still greater mystery :—“ *What* (He says) *and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before ? ”*

The words are an appeal to the crowning miracle of His ascension. If they shall see Him ascend up to that blessed home in heaven, then they will surely believe that He came down from heaven; and they will no more doubt that He is indeed the Bread of Life. Then will they learn that it is the Spirit that quickeneth, not the flesh; and they will realize that the words which Jesus spoke concerning His flesh and blood, "are spirit, and are life." These were indeed hard sayings to the disciples; hard to be understood, and hard to believe. But when the day of His ascension had come, and He had led them out as far as to Bethany, and lifted up His hands and blessed them, and was parted from them, and carried up into heaven; *then* "they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."

No longer were His "sayings hard": they were the words of eternal Life.

Are not we also troubled with some of the *hard sayings* in Holy Scripture? Are there not some precepts and some doctrines hard to be received? These very words, which offended the Jews, are still an offence to many who call themselves Christians; and many, alas! go back. They fear to seek Christ in His Holy Sacrament: they cannot, in their natural condition, apprehend the life-giving Spirit of His body broken, and His precious blood shed. If, dear brethren, we also find it difficult to behold the Son of man ascending up where He was before, what is the remedy? The

remedy of the disciples is also ours. They "gazed up to heaven, and worshipped Him."

If, therefore, we are willing to gaze upon Christ ascending into heaven, our hearts will no longer be carnal, but spiritual. When the priest cries, "Lift up your hearts unto the Lord," shall not we respond with thankful joy? "We lift them up unto the Lord." But, alas! how many have miserably failed to believe in Christ ascending into heaven! How few care to come to church on Ascension Day!

Other great festivals—Christmas, and Good Friday—are celebrated with congregations as large as on Sundays. Christmas, the birth-day of Christ; and Good Friday, the day of His death, draw us into His presence:—we rejoice in His birth, we mourn for His agony, we glory in His rising unto Life immortal. Why then do you not in holy joy lift up your hearts to Him ascending into heaven? As His resurrection is the pledge of our life, a life that death cannot touch, so His ascension is the pledge of our glorification in the presence of God. If faithfully, devoutly, and reverently, we celebrate the exaltation of our Lord, we ascend with Him; our hearts are "lifted up unto the Lord."

Judge yourselves: let us all judge ourselves.

Where were you, and *how* were you engaged, all through our Lord's Coronation Day? Some of you could not come to church in the morning; but many of you might have come in the evening.

Thank God, you have another opportunity to worship your ascended King, this day, the Sunday after Ascension Day. Lift up your hearts, therefore, unto the Lord. Behold Him by faith, seated upon His throne—not as He was before He came down from heaven, to take upon Himself our fallen nature, to suffer and to die—but as He is now, “perfect man, and perfect God,” established upon His heavenly throne for ever. Behold Him as your Redeemer, clothed in the glorious garments of holiness—the Lord of life immortal, awaiting the complete salvation of all His ransomed!

It is the Coronation Day of our Heavenly King. O keep it, this day, as you have never kept it hitherto! “What and if ye shall (by faith) see Him ascending up where He was before?” (John vi. 62). With what love and adoration should we gaze upon Him ascending into the heavens, thence to send down wonderful blessings from the throne of His glory, upon which He took His seat at the right hand of the Father! Consider, therefore, what is the force and meaning of the ascension. Jesus Himself has told us why He should ascend unto His Father. It was in order that we may celebrate it aright. Jesus tells His disciples, “I ascend unto My Father and your Father.” Mary Magdalene was assured beforehand, on the Resurrection Day, when He bade her, “Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God” (John xx. 17).

Let us follow her faith, that we may be prepared to see Him, "who is our life;" then shall we also "appear with Him in glory" (Col. iii. 4).

Consider further how all our hopes and longings are bound up in the truth of the Ascension. For what is our hope? The Psalmist answers, "In God is my hope." But how can we reach unto the throne of God? How can we pass the great gulf between the creature and the Creator?—between the All Holy and the fallen?

By Christ, *as Man*, we reach up to the *Godhead*. He is the ladder between earth and heaven, whereon the patriarch beheld "the angels of God, ascending and descending." God is all in all to thee; but in Christ God was made man. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

That which was *far* from thee is, by the manhood of Christ, brought *near*. But now He has ascended in our nature. *Here God is: there above* (where we hope to go) *man is*: the same Christ, God and Man: God in power, Almighty: Man in perfect union with believing men. God, *present* with us, to help us: Man, gone up for us, "to prepare a place" for us.

Behold this season, then, as the Coronation of our Heavenly King. The great work of our redemption is finished. He returns in triumph to heaven, leading captivity captive, and takes His seat upon the right hand of God.

"Behold! a throne was set in heaven, and One sat upon the throne" (Rev. iv. 2). "A throne

in Heaven : ” but who was He who should take His seat thereon ? Jesus tells us WHO—“ The Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory ” (Matt. xix. 28).

He, “ *the Word*, was made flesh : ” but now, “ God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name : that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God ” (Philip. ii. 9—11). He was, indeed, abiding in that glorious home before : as He says of Himself, “ What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before ? ” (John vi. 62). “ He *was* there before,” but not AS “ the Son of man.” For His glorified humanity, this was a first enthronement ; and in His humanity He there abides, awaiting that hour, wherein the whole body of the elect shall be gathered in.

What, dear brethren, can move our hearts, what can ennoble us more, than to behold our Blessed Saviour bearing our burdens, comforting us in our sorrows, giving His precious life to save us and assure us of life eternal ? The deep wailing of the Psalmist, “ My soul cleaveth to the dust,” is the universal cry of the thoughtful man, ignorant of Christ, and Him crucified.

But blessed be He who came down from heaven ; He did not leave us to grope in darkness : no, He Himself went down into the darkness ; “ when the

sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." But in the appointed time, He came forth from the obscurity of the grave, all glorious. He abode awhile among the sons of men for the more confirmation of His disciples, and then returned to the Home of Bliss: that Home of which He said before, "I go and prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there ye may be also" (John xiv. 2, 3).

CHRIST DESCENDING, ASCENDING, AND IN HEAVEN.

ST. JOHN iii. 13—15.

“No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven,” &c.

ASCENSION thoughts should not lightly pass away. Let us, then, dwell thereon this day.

Again and again our blessed Saviour led the thoughts of His disciples to His glorious ascension to the throne of God, whereon He was to take His seat for ever and ever.

“A *little while*,” He said to His disciples, “and ye shall not see Me; and again, a *little while*, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father.” “What,” He asks, “and if ye see the Son of man ascend up where He was before?” Here also we see Nicodemus inquiring into the mystery of the new birth: “*How can a man*,” he says, “*be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?*” Jesus answered,

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

Here, then (in the case of Nicodemus, and in that of other of His disciples), we see our blessed Saviour leading them upwards towards the glorious mysteries of our redemption. He sets before them, Himself, *Who is in the heavens*: referring, doubtless, to the words of the Proverbs (xxx. 4): “ Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? . . . and what is His name; and what is His Son’s name?” Again (in the Psalms, lvii. 5—11): “ *Set up Thyself, O God, above the heavens . . . Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: let Thy glory be above all the earth.*”

To whom, then, are these glorious words addressed? Not to the Father, for He never was humbled; but to Him who was laid in the manger; to Him who hungered and thirsted, and was weary, for us: who was sold by Judas, was bought by the Jews; apprehended, bound, scorned, crowned with thorns, and nailed to the accursed tree: who was pierced with the spear,—“ dead and buried.” To *Him* it was addressed, “ Set up Thyself (Thou who art God) above the heavens:” set up Thyself who didst hang upon the cross. Of Him it was spoken by the Psalmist, “ Who is like unto the Lord our God, that hath His dwelling so high, and yet humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in the earth? He taketh up the simple out of the dust, and lifteth the poor out of

the mire, that He may set Him with princes, even with the princes of His people.”

Our blessed Lord applies these prophecies to Himself, under the title of the Son of God. He had already descended from the heavens. He was prepared, in His own good time, to return, and take His appointed seat on the right hand of God. At the same time, He says that, even when He speaks upon earth, He is in Heaven.

Two objections may be made to what has been above stated.

(1) *First*, that “He who descended from the heavens was God alone:” and *secondly*, that “He who ascended was man.” Yes; but He was ONE Christ.

He does not say that *nothing* “hath ascended up to heaven;” He says that *no one* (*ὄυδείς*) had ascended; and this refers to the person, not to the clothing of the person. Christ descended without the clothing of the body; but He ascended, clothed with that spotless body which He had assumed in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

(2) The second objection is, that Jesus declared Himself to be in Heaven, even while He was still upon the earth. His words were—“No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.” Whereas they saw Him before their eyes upon earth. But this also was answered by the hypostatic union. He was still upon the

earth in His humanity; and yet in His Divinity He was in Heaven.

He then proceeds to say, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." The serpent was lifted up; with what object? To obtain *bodily* healing: but Christ was lifted up to procure *spiritual* healing. The brazen serpent in the wilderness was the image of the deadly serpent; but it was the image without the poison. Christ was in the *likeness* of sinful flesh, but without the sin.

He was lifted up, *first* upon the cross; but, in the appointed time, He, "The Son of man, must be lifted up." And He Himself declares that, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me" (John xii. 32).

Behold Him, far above all the heavens! seated at the right hand of God! "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ;" but this does not set up a bar against the other joyful celebrations of His glory; therefore, "lift up your hearts unto the Lord," our ever-living Saviour. We were not indeed witnesses of His glorious ascension, but we believe it; therefore, we may lay hold of the promise in the Gospel: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed"—they are Christ's own words (John xx. 29). Let us, then, lay hold upon this gracious promise: we have not seen His wonderful miracles of mercy, nor have we heard His own loving words; but "blessed are they that

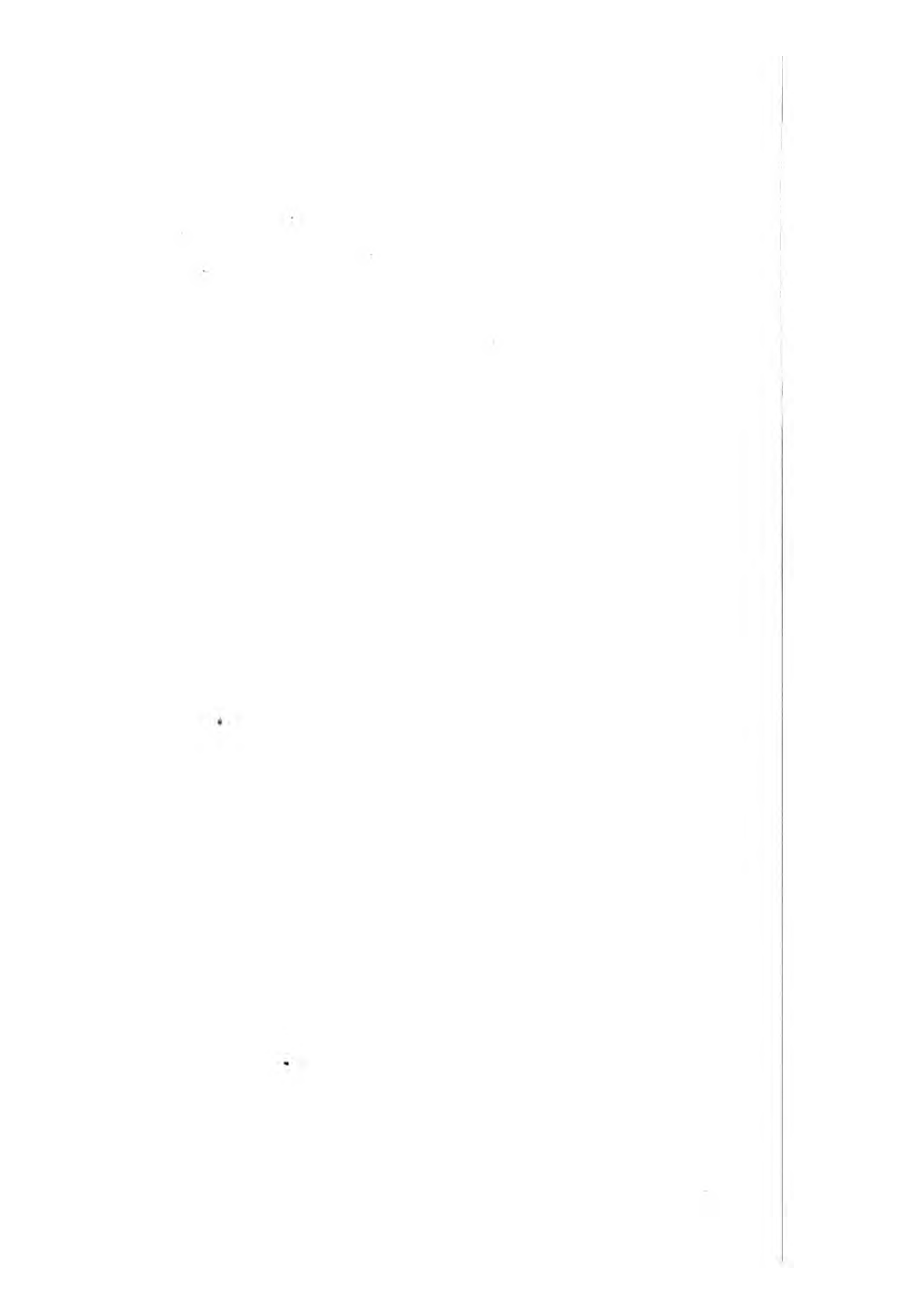
have not seen, and yet have believed"—they are His own words. We see His miracles and hear His teaching, with the eyes and the ears of our hearts.

So shall we (by the grace of God) ascend, not by our own virtue, but by our unity with the ascended Saviour. For "*two* are one flesh." "Great is the mystery of Christ and His Church ;" "no more twain, but one flesh."

He descended, that He might restore thee from thy fallen condition. He ascended, that He might prepare a place for thee in heaven.

"Lift up your heart unto the Lord." He is your refuge. But if you lift up your heart to other than the Lord, you will fall into the sin of pride.

As long as we are in the world, even the holiest will fall more or less. If by the grace of God you are free from deadly sin, remember that to *wish* for what you know to be wrong is sin ; to think complaisantly of that which has led you towards evil is sin ; but God in His infinite mercy has given, besides the original washing of regeneration, other daily remedies. Our daily cleansing is the Lord's prayer. If earnestly and steadfastly we say, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us," the gracious Father will bid us "Lift our heart unto the Lord."



THE LIVING WATER.

JOHN vii. 37—39.

“ In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive : for the Holy Ghost was not yet given ; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) ”

ON the seventh day of the feast of tabernacles it was the custom for the priests to bring water in golden vessels from the pool of Siloam, with great pomp, to the temple, and then solemnly offer it to God, and pour it upon the altar, singing the Alleluia, the 113th and the 114th Psalms. On the eighth day, the Psalms alone were sung ; and on the *last* day of the last of the series of festivals, Jesus *stood*, that all might see Him : He *cried*, that all might *hear* His gracious invitation : “ If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink,” fulfilling the words of the Preacher, “ Wisdom crieth without : she uttereth her voice

in the streets." . . . "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?" . . . "Behold, I will pour out My Spirit unto you; I will make known My words unto you" (Prov. i. 20—23). "He that believeth in Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John vii. 38).

The promise is not found in so many words, but substantially, in the fourteenth chapter of the prophet Zechariah: "It shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former (or 'the eastern') sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be" (xiv. 8).

"If any man thirst," said our Saviour, "let him come unto Me, and drink." He puts 'thirst' first, not 'hunger.' Hunger results in exhaustion; prolonged thirst ends in madness. What, then, is the object of the soul's thirst? First, it seeks for *happiness*: secondly, it craves for *love*: thirdly, it seeks after *knowledge*: fourthly, it longs for *holiness*. But, alas! does not fallen man, if left to himself, find in place of happiness, *misery*; for love, *bereavement*; for knowledge, *perplexity*; and lastly, for holiness, *sin*? Where, then, can we find true bliss? unchangeable love? clear knowledge? perfect wisdom? and unspotted holiness? Jesus, and He alone, can satisfy the cry of fallen man. "If any man thirst," cries our gracious Saviour, "let him come unto ME and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said,

out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” “This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive:” and it was fulfilled for the apostles on the day of Pentecost: for then the Holy Ghost was poured upon them from on high. With the “sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind,” that “filled all the house where they were sitting, there appeared unto the apostles cloven tongues, like as of fire, and sat upon each of them, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost.”

Upon us also these gracious gifts are bestowed, if we are faithful to our Lord; but they are given without the sound from heaven of a rushing wind. To us the gracious gifts of the Holy Ghost are conveyed by the “laying on of hands.” Silently, yet truly, the seven-fold gifts are imparted to the thirsty soul, “the spirit of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength; the spirit of knowledge and true godliness; and the spirit of God’s holy fear.”

But these gifts, so graciously bestowed in Confirmation, are not exhausted in the giving. “Rivers of living water” are Christ’s gifts. “*Whosoever,*” he says, “that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life” (John iv. 14).

Try to realize these gracious promises. In all your troubles you will find support and patience,

to bear them ; courage, to fight against the temptations from within and from without ; “ wisdom,” to refuse the evil and to choose the good ; “ *understanding*,” to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God ; “ *counsel*,” to help your brother with kindly words of guidance ; and “ *ghostly strength*,” to enable you to overcome your spiritual enemies ; “ *knowledge*,” that you may imprint it on your own soul, and impart it (in a loving spirit) to those who are ignorant and out of the way ; “ *true godliness*,” that in all your ways you should acknowledge *Him* ; that you may do all things as in His sight—that the promotion of His glory should be the end and aim of all your endeavours.

Do these gracious promises seem to be far beyond what is natural ? Oh ! no. Our life is not the life of the dumb animals. Our true life is not to eat, and to drink, and to take our rest. Our true life is not to have a loving wife ; a kind helpmate ; obedient and healthy children. Our true life is not to hold offices of trust and honour, and to be called, “ Rabbi, Rabbi.” Our true life is not to enjoy the pleasures of the world ; for the bond of family affection is apt to be rudely snapped. The loving wife is taken from her husband’s side, perhaps suddenly ; the sweet, obedient child is called to the Home of the great Father above. Our life upon earth is but “ as a shadow that passeth away . . . and so soon as we are born we begin to draw to our end ” (Wisdom v. 9 and 13). But God, in His great love, liveth for ever and ever ; and it

is His gracious will that we should live with Him in life eternal. Therefore it was that He gave His dear Son to die for us, that we might be redeemed from sin and death, and be made partakers of His holiness. To this end He has promised us that "living water," whereof if we drink "we shall never thirst; but it shall be in us a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

God has so made us that we long for happiness. We all feel that we have not laid hold of perfect peace, and joy, and rest, and refreshment. As long as we seek our happiness in this world we must be disappointed: and why? Because God has prepared a better life for us; a life that never ends.

God made man in His own image; but, alas! we have fallen; the image is marred: therefore, until we are restored from the fall we shall never be satisfied. "As for me," says the Psalmist, "I will behold Thy presence in righteousness, and when I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it" (Ps. xvii. 16).

This, dear brethren, is that for which every true Christian longs—to "see God," and to love Him for ever: nothing else can satisfy us, because God made us for that end.

But perhaps you feel that God is so far away from you, that your cry is, "I cannot see Him: how then can I *know* Him? and if I know Him not, how can I love Him?" Yes. God is afar off, beyond our gaze, and beyond our understanding;

but it does not therefore follow that He is beyond our love, if we draw near to Him in Jesus. Therefore, dear brethren, did He send His dear Son into the world, that in the face of Jesus we may "see God" and yet live. Therefore Jesus stood and cried: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." To every faithful heart He fulfils His promise day by day; especially when we commemorate the outpouring of the graces of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Listen, then, to His loving invitation: "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, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Listen to another gracious promise: "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come unto you . . . I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth." And again, He says: "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My Name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John xiv. 26, 27).

Have not we also, dear brethren, found how true is this promise? Has not the Holy Ghost brought to our knowledge, and again and again to our remembrance, all that the Lord Jesus has done, and suffered, and spoken for us? May we

not, then, take to ourselves His gracious promises? "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John xiv. 27). All these gracious gifts are brought home to us by His Spirit. When Jesus spoke, the Holy Spirit "had not yet come, because Jesus was not then glorified." But now He is glorified. He was glorified in His Resurrection, in His Ascension, and in His Session on the Right Hand of God.

Then was fulfilled the words spoken to His sorrowing disciples: "I tell you the truth; 'It is expedient for you that I go away'" ; and He told them why He should leave them; "for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." Therefore is the Holy Ghost now given abundantly to those who seek His holy graces. No need that we be slaves to our own evil desires; no longer can "Satan get an advantage of us," if we are true to our profession. Jesus has deprived him of his power. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you," says James.

See how boldly and confidently the Apostle Paul speaks: "Sin (he says) shall not have dominion over you," and he tells us why: "For ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. vi. 14). The law says: "Do this, and live:" but it does not give the power. Jesus says: "Do this, and live," and at the same time He gives you the almighty help of the Holy Ghost.

In this strength, then, fight bravely and hopefully against your besetting sins. Fight manfully, patiently, with earnest prayer for help, and then you will have on your side the almighty power of God.

Seek with earnest cries for "the living water," the "well of water springing up into everlasting life." Fill the cistern of your hearts from the fountains of living waters: wash away the stain of past sins in the "fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness" (Zech. xiii. 1).

For pitiful compassion, for love greater than all earthly love, seek your Saviour's face. Behold Him, pleading for our redemption, in the garden of Gethsemane: "Being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." He will draw you to Himself: He will have compassion upon you, and save you. And through Him, who thus gave Himself for you, do you draw near to the Eternal Father, who loved you from eternity, and gave His dear Son, that you might live with Him for ever in heaven.

GRACE, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND MERCY.

PSALM cxvi. 5.

“ Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful.”

It is hard for upright men to be patient and merciful in dealing with unprincipled men. It is hard to feel kindly towards a thief, or a murderer; but Jesus, upon the cross, touched the heart of the penitent thief, and granted to him forgiveness in the very hour of death; a full pardon with a still fuller promise: “To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.”

The wrath of God is not inconsistent with His mercy. As wrath is revealed against all iniquity, so mercy is over all His works, and aboundeth towards those that fear Him. *That* mercy is frequently set before us in Holy Scripture. “His mercy is ever more and more towards us.” “He is gracious, because His mercy endureth for ever.” How, then, can His righteous *anger* against sin be reconciled with His mercy? In the text He is declared to be “gracious,” “righteous;” yea,

“merciful.” No doubt righteousness is the source of wrath against sin; as *unrighteousness* is its object; and if God’s righteousness had stood *alone*, then wrath would have assuredly followed, for us miserable sinners. But our heavenly Father is not righteous only, but *gracious first*, and then righteous. By grace He is righteous, yet merciful; nay, *therefore* merciful.

O, then, dear brethren, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good—His mercy endureth *for ever*;—yes, for ever and ever; and not only so, but increasing: “For His merciful kindness is ever *more and more* towards us; and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever” (Ps. cxvii.).

If you ask, How can even a gracious God be righteous, and yet be merciful to the unrighteous? Let us turn, for an answer, to the First Epistle of St. John (i. 7): “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.” “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, to the riches of His grace” (Eph. i. 7). Here we see how “God may be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus” (Rom. vi. 26).

Gracious is He, our heavenly *Father*; therefore, “He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all” (Rom. viii. 32). Gracious and merciful is the eternal Son; therefore He gave Himself for our redemption, the innocent for the guilty, and, He *being willing*, “the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Thus has God graciously made mercy POSSIBLE without the breach of righteousness. "Mercy and truth are met together," in Christ Jesus; "righteousness and peace have kissed each other," in the Incarnate God.

The Pharisaic righteousness, in Simon, looked with contempt upon the weeping woman, as a sinner (Luke vii. 39—50); on the other hand, the righteousness of grace in Christ proclaims, "Thy sins be forgiven thee"; "thy faith hath saved thee"; "go in peace." Penitence was inwrought by the Holy Spirit, and the love of Jesus entered into her broken heart, to abide there for ever.

Wonderful is the conversion of the soul that has for many years lived without God in the world! The righteous wrath of God is most certain; but, on the other hand, His mercy is also assuredly true. If we cannot reconcile them, God can.

Let us, therefore fear His wrath; for "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. vii. 11); therefore flee from sin. Let us *believe* and trust in God's mercy, and with loving confidence go to Him for grace to keep His commandments.

1. Here notice that even in the case of the wicked and impenitent, wrath is mitigated by mercy. God is patient and long-suffering, giving space for *repentance*: He is waiting to be gracious.

Take the case of Ahab. How patient and long-suffering was God with this wicked king! God promised that not in *his* days should the punish-

ment come. How tenderly and graciously was the timid man enticed to an entire and true repentance and change of life.

Has not God dealt as tenderly and patiently with some of you? Severe sickness has laid you on what seemed to be the bed of death; but God in His mercy restored you to health.

There may be some who have incurred heavy losses in business, and poverty has seemed to be your doom; but God in His mercy has reinstated you: your losses have been restored, and the fear of poverty has passed away. Once more—Have you, in time of prevailing sickness, seen your beloved ones all but lost to you?—but your dear ones are restored. And why? Because God, in His loving mercy, would draw you to Himself. If you respond to His goodness, you will taste His infinite mercy. But for the impenitent, who harden their hearts, these minglings of mercy with judgment are, after all, only like gleams of sunshine *between* the thunder-clouds. The storm bursts out at length, in all its fury: the lightnings flash, the thunder rolls; and where the fiery bolt strikes, deadly destruction follows. Even so the wrath of God will be finally revealed against the impenitent; and, to the children of disobedience, that wrath will be only the more terrible by contrast with the gleamings of mercy which they have rejected.

2. But, thanks be to God, there is for the penitent another, and far more glorious, fulfilment

of the text. To every one who truly repents, God will say, as He said to Paul, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins."

Yes; as surely as *he* was forgiven in his baptism, so surely, "If *we* confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Our past sins will be blotted out in the precious blood of Christ. Listen to God's promise to the penitent: "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more" (Heb. viii. 12).

Behold! then, the very Gospel message: these are the true good tidings of great joy—the full and free forgiveness of all sins *confessed, hated, forsaken*—forgiveness by a God, "faithful and just;" or, as the text, "gracious and righteous:" *gracious*, to give a Saviour; *faithful*, to fulfil His promises of mercy; true to His word; true to His character. The "righteous Lord loveth righteousness" (Ps. xi. 8). His pardoning mercy leads the penitent to holiness of life.

Herein is true mercy: for thus alone can true peace and true joy be found. Gracious and righteous is the bountiful Giver of mercies: gracious is the gift of salvation: gracious is the gift of power to receive the *grace* bestowed upon the penitent through Christ: righteous by the all-perfect righteousness of Christ; of which every true Christian, being grafted into Him, is made partaker: God's gracious love being the fountain

from whence flows forth the grace which is given to us in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Ask of God to give you true repentance. Ask Him to give you a contrite heart. Ask Him, with earnest pleading, to give you a deep hatred of sin. Ask of Him to pour into your heart such love towards Him, that loving Him with all your heart and mind and soul, you may receive His gracious promise of forgiveness, through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To whom shall we go but to Him who came down into the world to seek and to save those that were lost?—who came to give Himself a sacrifice for our sins— who bore our sins in His body on the cross.

Kneel down this evening, and ask Him to forgive you all your transgressions. Tell Him how lost and hopeless you are. Ask Him to wash away all your sins in His precious blood.

Ask Him to give you true sorrow for your sins. Ask Him to give you holy courage to resist the tempter, and turn away from those sins which have held you bound in the cruel chain of evil habits.

He is gracious and merciful: and He is also righteous. Plead therefore earnestly in His name, Who can impart grace, the loving favour of our God—Who can be righteous, and yet forgive the penitent: He is merciful, tender, and loving.

OUR USE OF PRESENT PRIVILEGES.

ST. LUKE xiv. 15.

“Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.”

THE Pharisees were ever ready to find fault with Jesus, yet they could neither deny that He healed the sick, and wrought mighty miracles, nor that His miracles were works of mercy and loving-kindness.

On this occasion our Saviour was a guest in the house of one of the Pharisees on the Sabbath day. It was their custom to allow sick people to enter their houses for relief and comfort. While Jesus was in the house there was a man who had the dropsy. Knowing that the Pharisees were ready to find fault with Him, Jesus asked them, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?” but they held their peace. They were afraid to affirm that it was unlawful; but, on the other hand, they were unwilling to confess that it *was* lawful. Jesus therefore “took the sick man, healed him, and let him go;” and then He showed that they them-

selves had no scruple to pull up an ass, or an ox, which had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath day. "And they could not answer Him."

He then set before them how ready they were to take the highest places for themselves; and showed them how much more blessed it is to call to their festal board the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind, for then "shalt thou be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. And when one of them *that sat at meat with Him heard these things, he said unto Him,* "BLESSED IS HE THAT SHALL EAT BREAD IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD" — (St. Luke xiv. 14 — 19). Alas! of all those who sat at meat with Jesus in the Pharisee's house, one alone seems to have laid to heart the teaching of our Lord. And even *he* probably did not fully understand the meaning of his own words.

Probably he was looking forward to the great feast, of which the Passover was a type, which the Jews expected "at the resurrection of the just," and perhaps assumed that he himself would be a partaker. In answer to this man's aspiration, Jesus speaks the parable of the "Great Supper." "A certain man made a great supper, and bade many." St. Matthew says (xxii. 2), "*A certain king made a marriage for his son*" — God, the King of all: "*a great supper;*" "*a feast of fat things, full of marrow, of wines on the lees, well refined,*" (Isa- xxv. 6); "*the marriage supper of the Lamb,*"

of which St. John writes, by the inspiration of God, "*Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb*" (Rev. xix. 9).

Here, then, are set before us all gospel blessings. To this heavenly feast *many were bidden*. The Jews were first called, by John the Baptist: then Jesus Himself invited them to the marriage of the Lamb; and to draw them still nearer to Himself, He says, "I am the Bread of Life," "I am the living bread which came down from heaven;" and then He most graciously adds: "If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (St. John vi. 48—51).

Then, in His great love to the lost and erring soul, He says to His disciples, *first*, "Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (St. Matt. x. 6). "But, alas! they all began with one consent to make excuse" (St. Luke xiv.). The feast was prepared, but they were not ready to come in. They would neither open their hearts to Him that knocked, nor would they receive His gracious invitation, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." They cared not to "labour for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life."

The same blessing is also offered to us. How, then, do *we* receive His gracious invitation? *Who of us* is not ready to say, "*Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God;*" or, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth:

yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. xiv. 13). May I stand on the right hand in the last day!

But do we mean it? or is it only a form of speech? Take the parable which Jesus spoke in answer to the exclamation, "*Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God*"—"A certain man made a great supper, and bade many." WE are among those who are invited; but how many accept the gracious invitation? How many of you turn away from your Saviour's loving voice!

He has sent forth His servants, the preachers of the gospel. You are again and again entreated, in His holy name, to open the door, that He may enter into your hearts.

In the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the faithful enjoy the foretaste of the marriage of the Lamb in heaven. Have you not often been invited to partake with them? but what have many of you done? You have begun to make excuse; and your excuses are exactly those which our Lord has condemned.

"*I have bought a field, and I must needs go and see it; I pray thee have me excused.*" "*I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.*" "*I have married a' wife, and therefore I cannot come;*" a positive refusal.

Now mark (my brethren), the ordinary nature of these excuses: all alike they were things lawful and natural; they were perfectly harmless in them-

selves. It is not wrong to buy a field, or to buy five yoke of oxen, or to prove them. Marriage, "holy matrimony," was sanctified by our Lord's presence at the marriage in Cana of Galilee.

Where, then, lies the hindrance? Alas! it is in the mind of the invited guest. The spirit of the excuse is the evil. It marks the heart alienated from the love of God. It shows that the heart is satisfied, or tries to be satisfied, with this world, its pleasures, and its gains. Your heart is engrossed in lower pleasures, and has no room for Christ.

Alas! you say (in your heart), "Excuse me," "I cannot come." Alas! it means, too often, "*I will not come.*"

But why, my dear brothers and sisters, why should you turn away from your Saviour's loving voice? The ordinary occupations of life need be no hindrance to coming to Jesus in the Holy Communion.

It is not the farm, the business, the house life, that hinders you from drawing near to the Holy Table; it is the worldly heart.

There is no need to give up your business, but your business will be blessed, the more you draw near to God. Some, indeed, may be called to a higher life, a special ministry of love; and any of you may, in God's providence, be laid up in sickness, or you may lose your dearest earthly blessings—the wife of your bosom, or your dear loving children, may be taken from you.

Then, where will you turn for comfort and

support? The world cannot call the departed ones to life again. But God can comfort you, for He may first console you in your sorrows, and by those sorrows He may draw you nearer to your Saviour.

Blessed will you be (dear brethren), if you will, before those days of sorrows come, seek God's Holy Presence. Do not be satisfied with feeble wishes to be better than you are.

Jesus says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

If you are held back from the Holy Communion by doubts and fears, pray God to teach you, and guide you. Confess your sins before God, and beseech Him to forgive you your sins, for Christ's sake; but if you cannot so find peace, seek the minister of Christ, whose duty it is to give comfort and counsel to those who are in doubt and fear.

But there must be something very wrong, and very sad, that so many withdraw from our Saviour's loving call.

Some are held back from Holy Communion by real fears (which must be respected); others by actual sins: alas! this is the worst reason of all, for it leads to death eternal.

Many are withheld by the engrossment of business. But, whatever the reason may be, this is plain:—So long as we turn away from our Saviour's invitation *now*, we cannot say with a

clear conscience, or with a reasonable hope, "*Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!*" The hope of heaven is dimmed and blurred, by coldness and indifference to present privileges.

The presence of God, by His indwelling Spirit, is the fire of love: "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." This is the only pledge of future happiness. The heavenly life is one; it is begun on earth; it is perfected in heaven. "*When Christ, who is our Life, shall appear, then shall we appear with Him in glory.*" But, *if we will not have Him as our Life here, we cannot be with Him in joy hereafter.* If we do not receive Him *here*, as our Saviour, we must stand before Him as our judge *there*.

O pray earnestly that God would give you a loving heart; a true earnest desire for the Bread of Life!

"I am the Resurrection and the Life," saith the Lord. He only can renew your life. He loves you more than you love yourselves. It is not His will that you should die; but that you should live with Him *for ever*. For this end, He gave His spotless body to the agony of the cross, that you may be holy as He is holy. He shed His precious blood, that you may be released from all sin. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours." They worked for

Him, and He fed them ; “ He fed His people in the wilderness with manna.” In heaven they will eat angels’ food.

But if we turn away from Him, *here*, how can we receive the Bread of Life in heaven ?

THE HEAVENLY HOME.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 20.

“ *Our conversation (or our citizenship) is in heaven.*”
[ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει.]

THE ancient Greek was, above all things, a citizen. Living in the open air, in the lovely climate of his southern peninsula, inquisitive, sociable, and proud of the glory of the city which he called his own, he cared little for domestic comfort, and little for the welfare of Greece as a whole. His *citizenship* was his boast and his joy. The city was to him his all in all: *her* glory was his glory, *her* prosperity his happiness.

He had a voice in her councils. The State could neither declare war, nor conclude peace, without his consent. When other cities or countries were conquered by her armies, the fate of the subject-people depended on his vote.

Life or death, destruction or alliance, were decided by the united voice of the sovereign people.

The Romans had this feeling quite as strongly

as the Greeks, but with this difference, that wherever in the vast area of the Empire they had their abode, their thoughts and their affections were turned towards Rome itself, the one great city, the centre of all their glory.

Philippi was the leading Macedonian city of the district in which it stood, and a Roman colony. The native Greek inhabitants of Philippi had probably not forgotten that their city was founded by the great Macedonian, King Philip, and called by his name. They, no doubt, took pride in their city for its own sake.

The Roman inhabitants gloried in the higher citizenship of Rome. As Philippi was a colony, her people were entitled to all the privileges of Roman citizens. A Roman colony was in fact a portion of Rome itself, transplanted to the provinces. The colonists were governed by their own Senate and magistrates, and were therefore free from the governor of the province in which the colony stood.

The words, therefore, of the apostle, "Our citizenship, 'or our *City*,' or our *State*," would come with peculiar force upon all the Philippian Christians.

If they were of the subject race, *i. e.* if they were *native* Macedonians, the words would remind them of the former glory of their own city, Philippi, and of the privileges they once enjoyed as Grecian citizens; it would console them under their present trials, as a subject race, to consider that though they

were not freemen of Rome, though they did not enjoy the privileges of the Roman citizenship, yet they had a citizenship above. They could therefore say: "We are freemen of that heavenly City, which hath unshaken foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God; *our city is in heaven.*"

If, on the other hand, his converts were of the favoured race; if they had in their heathen state enjoyed the privileges of Roman citizens, and had then minded *earthly things* (which we are all apt to do, when the world goes well with us), *now* they would feel the call of their apostolic teacher, to lift their thoughts and affections to a higher and nobler citizenship than that of Rome.

Now that they were Christians, many of their highest privileges as Roman citizens, had lost their value. Heathen Rome was no longer the central object of their thoughts. They were contemned and despised by their heathen fellow-citizens; a new bond of union was therefore necessary for them; accordingly the apostle points them to the *City of the Great King*. Heaven is their city now. St. Paul, himself a citizen of Rome, (see Acts xxii. 28), writes to them as his fellow-citizens, and draws their hearts to the heavenly city.

We, too, have a pride and glory, not, indeed, in one particular *city*, or town, or village; but in our *country*. We are all proud of the name of *Englishmen*; we feel that each of us has a share in all that constitutes England a great and noble empire.

To us, therefore, this appeal of the apostle should come home as Englishmen. The love of country, and a pride in our country's glory, may indeed degenerate into the "minding of earthly things." It behoves us, therefore, to remember, that OUR *country* is in the *heavens*. Whatever just cause we may have to thank God that we were born in a free land, and are subjects of a country which shines as a light in the world; to which God has given a vast empire, and a place of high honour to the world; yet, remember, that all these privileges must be left behind at the call of death. England's glory may shine on for many hundred ages, but we shall have passed into the unseen world; our bodies will be sleeping in the quiet churchyard; our souls will have entered into the world of spirits, awaiting the resurrection. How glorious, then, it is to think that we have a more sure word of promise than any glory that an earthly kingdom can bestow! "Ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels" (Heb. xii. 22). And again, we have received a "kingdom which cannot be moved."

Behold the *glorious vision* as revealed to the beloved disciple: "He showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious; even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal." "And the city had no

need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the [glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev. xxi. 10, 23).

May God, by His Holy Spirit, so fit and prepare us for that heavenly city, that we may enter in, remembering that "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (ver. 27).

This, dear brethren, is our glorious country. Here is our dwelling-place for ever, if we seek it with our whole heart. God is our King; the Lamb that was slain is our beloved Ruler; a Lamb, and yet a Shepherd; a Man of sorrows, and yet a mighty Conqueror, and the King of Glory.

But we English people are much unlike either the ancient Greeks or Romans.

City life is not to us what it was to the Greeks. The glory of our empire is not what Rome was to the ancient Romans. *We* cling to each other *more closely*, within a narrower circle. Ours is not an *out-door* life, nor are we *a nation of soldiers*.

Our thoughts centre in *home*. Our deepest affections, our tenderest interests, are bound up in the family. If St. Paul had written this letter to *us*, I do not think he would have said, "Your 'CITIZENSHIP' is in heaven." He would have appealed to deeper feelings; he would have touched a hidden string, which would have

yielded sweeter music. I think he would have said to us, "Your *home* is in heaven."

Englishmen indeed we are; but, thank God, England is the land of many *homes*. We have a word (*this word HOME*) which is unknown in some languages. We may, therefore, take up the apostle's exhortation, and say, "Our *home* is in heaven." God is our *Father*; the Lord Jesus Christ is our Elder Brother, and our Friend. The Church of the elect is *one united holy brotherhood*. It is our "ever-abiding home."

Let us try to realize THIS home, and so *return to the bliss of childhood*. *Home* was then a home *unchangeable; stable, sure*—no dread of change—no ever-recurring consciousness of instability! How different now! There is one only *home* on earth—the CHILD'S HOME, who has known no other state, nor can conceive it. And the child is right. God gave the instinct, and will fulfil it, to the obedient.

The Christian faith shows us once more the long vista of an endless *peace*, like that enjoyed by trusting childhood; only more glorious and more *sure*. A home which never can be broken up! No cruel partings there! No long separations. All-devouring death finds no entrance *there*. Nor is this all.

That home is more than *secure*. It is a home perfect in itself. There is the One Almighty Parent, ruling His family with all a father's wisdom, and more than a mother's tenderness;

uniting both in His one precious name, "GOD IS LOVE."

The sacred brotherhood is held together in the bonds of an unselfish affection.

No jealousies are there! no estrangements! no misunderstandings; but perfect peace, perfect unity, perfect sympathy.

"*Our home is in heaven.*" Yes, heaven is our home, even now, *if we are willing.* If only we try earnestly to live the heavenly life, our hearts will be lifted up above the earth, even while in our bodies we dwell here below.

A child-like faith in God, through Christ, opens the eyes of our understanding, that we may see "*the King in His beauty, and the land which is afar off.*"

A loving obedience brings us near to God, in His dear Son, by the grace of His blessed Spirit.

Oh, then, let us earnestly try so to live as those whose *home is in heaven!* Let us love our Father in heaven, and reverently obey His commandments. Let us trust Him with a perfect, child-like confidence.

Let us love our neighbours, as those who are, by the grace of God, to be our fellow-citizens, and our brothers, in the new Jerusalem—our *everlasting home.* Let us so live that we may follow the footsteps of the faithful departed—mother, child, husband, wife, brother, or sister. Let us so live before, and among, those who are still spared to us, that, by our example, we may draw them upwards

along the pathway to heaven. Let us commit the absent to the gracious care of the common Father. Let us bow down in holy reverence, with one heart, and one voice; giving worship and glory to Him who brought us into being, who gave us a heart capable of love, and bestowed upon us brothers and sisters in Christ, in dealing lovingly and tenderly with whom, we may show our love to Him, and so become fitted for the home of everlasting love.

KEEPING OUR BEST TILL LAST.

ST. JOHN ii. 10.

*“Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine ;
and when men have well drunk, then that which is
worse ; but thou hast kept the good wine until now.”*

To promise great things ; to give the best first, and then to fall off, and at last to fail, is the way of the world ; and thus it is described by the ruler of the feast at which our Saviour turned the water into wine. “When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was, the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine ; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse.” This is the way of the world. In the morning it is fair and bright and beautiful to look upon, and lavish of its gifts to the young and thoughtless : in the evening all its gay flowers of promise are cut down, dried up, and withered ; its fairest fruits have decayed ; and those that remain

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are sour and untempting. Is it not so? Is it not plain that however cheerful, joyous, light-hearted, and happy a young person may be, yet by degrees his cheerfulness will pass away, his joyousness will be overclouded, sadness will weigh upon his heart, and at last he will be grievously disappointed if he has no portion better than this world can afford him?

What can be more wretched than a wicked old man? what more desolate? what more hopeless? Where has the bright promise of the morning gone? It has passed and left no pleasurable trace behind. In one sense his lost enjoyments are as if they had not been: but in their *effects* on him they still live, a loathsome life—they have left their stamp upon him, the stamp of sin. The pleasure is gone, and the guilt remains; and the judgment draws on. Truly the world “at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse!” What is the world’s banquet? First, pleasure, without the necessity of absolute sin to obtain it; then immoderate indulgence in pleasure; then pleasures which can be obtained only by committing sin; then remorse without repentance, which must be drowned in reckless indulgence of the appetites; then weariness and disgust with ordinary sins; and a craving after something more ardent and exciting; and lastly a seared conscience, and absolute enjoyment of sin for its own sake—“knowing the judgment of God,

that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom. i. 32). Such is the course laid down by the world for those who follow her guidance. Such it is described in the Bible, such we see it to be in society around us.

But suppose it may be said (with truth) that this is a far stronger picture than we often see realized. Suppose you say that many men, especially among the poor, in the first place have no great enjoyments in their youth, and in the next, run into no great excesses as they grow up; they continue to be moderately satisfied till their life's end;—live on, that is, from day to day, avoiding what hardships they can, and bearing what they cannot avoid; taking such enjoyments as come, and doing without them when they cannot be had. Yet you must allow that even the hardest and most unmoved, matter-of-fact person, was more favoured by the world in childhood and early youth than he is in old age. Surely every one has had his bright visions of bliss, his warm hopes, and his secret treasure of delight, at one time or other!—and if these have passed away, and left behind them nothing but a cold, hard-hearted selfishness, which has every day less means of nourishment, it may truly be said of him that he has drunk his good wine, and has only left him that which is worse.

And here I must remind you that when we say the world thus deals with her votaries, we must

not forget who is the prince of this world ; and that *his* dominion ends not with this life ; but that he continues to assign to each his portion when this life is over,—to each of those over whom he gained dominion through the influence of the world. Suppose, then, that a man's life be uniformly prosperous, that riches increase with increasing years, and more solid satisfactions succeed those that are more light and frivolous, and that he dies respected and beloved ; and is gathered to his fathers in peace (so far as man can see), full of honours, full of years. *After all* he does but fulfil the words of the text—“at the beginning good wine, and when men have well drunk then that which is worse.” Though he have lived long and prosperously, and seen his children's children in plenty and prosperity, yet still he has only drunk the more deeply of the world's deadly cup—for, after all, this life is only the *beginning* ; “and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse” —the undying worm, and the unquenchable fire. This is the best the world can do. Even *at the very utmost* it can afford the good wine *only* till the day of death. It cannot give everlasting joy in place of everlasting misery : it cannot hinder the inevitable deadening effect of that poison which secretly, yet *surely*, works its way through the veins of those who drink deeply of its flattering cup.

Listen to the description given by the Psalmist of the prosperous man, and of his end. “I was

grieved," he says, "at the wicked: I do also see the ungodly in such prosperity. For they are in no peril of death, but are lusty and strong. They come in no misfortune like other folk, neither are they plagued like other men. . . Their eyes swell with fatness, and they do even what they lust. . . Lo! these are the ungodly, and these prosper in the world, and these have riches in possession. . . Then thought I to understand this: but it was too hard for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I the end of these men; namely, how Thou dost set them in slippery places, and castest them down, and destroyest them. Oh, how suddenly do they consume, perish, and come to a fearful end: yea, even like as a dream when one awaketh; so shalt Thou make their image to vanish out of the city."

Here you have described, in the first place, prosperity, uninterrupted, continued till the close of life; and then a miserable downfall. The good wine set forth *first* by the world; afterward that which is worse; and this even in the case of those whose prosperity, with the enjoyment of it, ceases not *while life remains*.

And now compare with this, the description of a good man in another of the Psalms. "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree; and shall spread abroad like a cedar in Libanus. Such as are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of the house of our God. *They also shall bring forth more fruit in their age*; and shall

be fat and well liking." Their last days are their best; and in the next life better still. Here, then, we have the same contrast expressed as that in the text. The world, and the men of the world, produce their best *first*; and in the end fail miserably: but our Great Bridegroom reserves for His guests the choicest, best, and most joyous, *till the last*. "Thou hast kept the good wine until now."

The pleasures of this world fade away like smoke, and are consumed as a decaying garment, the food of moths and worms: the pleasures which come from God through Christ are ever new, from generation to generation.

Such is the feast of the world, gay and brilliant at first; but soon it wearies, and sickens, and poisons, and turns at last to corruption.

The feast which Christ provides fails never, and never palls, but gives new health, and life, and strength. The pure streams of grace flow smoothly onward, like a bright and placid river, carrying beauty and fertility wherever they go. Thousands quench their thirst from those heavenly waters, and yet they are not diminished. And where they are once received they gladden every faithful heart, as a never-failing well of water, springing up into everlasting life.

The hearts of Christian children are full of mirth. They love happiness; and happiness loves to dwell with them. They rejoice in the portion which God has given them, as if there were no such gloomy thing as *woe* upon earth.

In very early youth we can scarcely determine how far this joy is of the earth, earthy—the natural overflowing of youthful health and good spirits; or how far it is a pure and blessed gladness, an innocent and healthy cheerfulness, springing from the fountain of grace within their hearts: how far the all-various grace of God, poured out upon them in such abundance in their baptism, displays its excellent beauty in bright, happy thoughts, and smiling love; in joyous hope, and fearless faith. But soon they will determine this question for themselves by the course they take. By the portion they choose, they will manifest to the world whether their gladness is mere animal high spirits, or whether it has a deeper source, and flows bright and beautiful in the sunshine of God's favour; whether their faces are lighted up by a mere natural cheerfulness, the fading reflection of the garden of Eden, or by the light of God's loving countenance from heaven.

Dear children, lift up your hearts to the blessed Jesus; and ask Him to pour His love into your hearts. You are now merry and light-hearted. We love to see you so. But, consider, my children, it rests with yourselves to determine whether your cheerfulness will grow up into true Christian joy, which shall live for ever, or whether it shall degenerate into earthly, sensual joy, which will quickly change into misery. In some sense you may be said to be *all* partakers of a feast: for “a merry heart is a continual feast.”

Which feast, then, will you choose?—the feast of the world, or the feast of Christ? Will you have the best *first*, or the best *last*? If you wish to have the best first, then cast in your lot with the world. The method is, alas! only too easy. Take all pleasures as they come: never consider what you *ought* to do, but what you *like* best. Choose your own way, not the way your parents and teachers point out for you: or only obey just so far as to escape punishment, and do whatever you like out of sight. Prefer pleasing *yourself* to pleasing others. Never give up your own wishes to gratify others, except when you would bring disgrace upon yourself by not doing so. Forget that God sees you, and will judge you; or at the best, take no particular pains to avoid all these selfish ways, or to do the reverse; and then you will be feasting after the world's fashion. But, alas! already will the world begin to fail you. Disappointment, vexation, fitfulness, envy, hatred, and a gnawing selfishness; these miseries will grow upon you day by day. Every day you will see the flowers which you have plucked lie withered and dying by the wayside: and when you have found yourself utterly forlorn and disconsolate, *you too will die*. But long before that time comes, you will bitterly confess that the world "at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse."

But if, on the other hand, you wish to have

your best *last*; then pray God to help you, and determine to partake of that holy feast which Christ provides for His own. For this end I earnestly beg you to attend to the following words: You are cheerful, and ready for enjoyment; yet *suspect* pleasures as they come. Examine them *well*, and *be sure* that they are innocent before you take them. If you doubt whether they are right, do not touch them. Wait awhile, *at least*, till you can ask some one older and wiser than yourself whether you may enjoy them or not.

When you are revelling in some harmless mirth, restrain yourself—do not drink your fill, nor gather all sweet flowers; remembering that the most beautiful earthly flowers will fade, and the best pleasures of the world will sicken us if we take too much; and remember that many of your brothers and sisters in Christ are drinking the cup of affliction. Remember, also, that Jesus withdrew Himself from worldly pleasures; and suffered cold, and hunger, and watching, and weariness, and inward sorrows too sacred to be mentioned in a passing way.

I do not bid you be melancholy, and morose, nor to abstain thanklessly from those earthly pleasures that God has prepared for you; but I advise you to take them *cautiously*, and watch yourselves while you enjoy them: and yet to do it cheerfully and thankfully, without show of being different from others. Perhaps you will say, “But it is so hard to be careful, and to watch ourselves!” I

know it is ; but I only tell you what Christ has commanded. He says, "I say unto all, *watch.*" He never promises to give the best *first*. He keeps the purest, holiest, most invigorating, and cheering wine for the last.

And yet, wine to make glad our hearts, and oil to make us of a cheerful countenance, are never wanting, but ever supplied—far beyond what this world can give. For sure I am that even *from the very first* a good child is far happier, brighter, and more cheerful than one who does not care to do his duty. And so it is with young men and young women ; those who are conscientious and religious, though gentle, and quiet, and subdued (and under check as trained soldiers), are yet *more uniformly* cheerful, contented, peaceful—more truly happy than their more boisterous and pleasure-loving comrades. *They* choose, indeed, an *easier* and more self-indulgent life ; but not a happier.

The very *beginnings*, then, of the Christian feast are better than the feast of the world at *its last*. The *lowest* of Christian joys are better than the *highest* of the world. It is better to walk with a light heart on the hard stones, than with a heavy heart, or a heart half intoxicated, dulled and stupefied in its better feelings, to tread the soft green turf of the *downward road*. How much better, then, is the Christian's portion as the two roads diverge further and further apart. For the child of God continually draws nearer to the Bridegroom in heaven : and is more abundantly blessed by

Him as he draws nearer, and learns to taste and enjoy that heavenly food better, as he becomes better himself. And from the very nature of true joy it must be so.

With a few words in explanation of this I will conclude.

What are the highest, and best, and purest, and least wearying joys? Not the pleasures of the senses. Not sweet sounds, nor sweet tastes, nor sweet smells, nor pleasures of the body. Not soft beds, nor soft carpets, nor easy couches, nor many servants, and horses and carriages. Not houses, and lands, and money. All these weary men very soon: no people are so often unhappy, peevish, fretful, discontented, ill at ease, as those who have all these earthly things in abundance. What then is our best joy? It is to *love those* who are *worth* loving. It is to *love with a pure* affection, and to be *beloved*. This is our portion. For this we were made. To know and to love: to be known and to be loved.

Not riches, and honour, and pleasure, but a *loving heart is each man's true treasure*. And this treasure is equally distributed among rich and poor, great and lowly.

Wherever the tender names of father, mother, sister, husband, child, and friend are known, *there* is found the best happiness which this lower world can give. Here, then, we see *at once* a reason why the joy of a Christian should be both higher and better than the pleasures of the world, and also

ever increasing: for in Christ Jesus all *good* earthly affections are sanctified and purified: and father, and friend, and brother, and child, are bound to us in Christ Jesus with holier and firmer bonds, *which never can be broken*. We love them as the members of Christ, as children of God, and as those with whom we *hope to dwell for ever in heaven*. And besides this, we are granted a higher and more worthy object of affection. For through Jesus Christ we are permitted to love Almighty God Himself, with all our heart, and mind, and soul, as our Heavenly Father; to love our Lord Jesus Christ, by new and most endearing titles, as our *Saviour* and *Redeemer*.

Earthly objects of affection may fail us, friends may fail us, and dear relations may be taken away, by distance or death, but God is the strength of our heart and our portion for ever. Our earthly father may reject and hate us; an earthly mother may forget and forsake her sucking child; but God will never leave us nor forsake us: He will draw us with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love, continually nearer to Himself, until He takes us at last to the home of His love in heaven.

This, then, is the true reason why the joy of a Christian ever flows purer and brighter the longer it continues to flow, because the more he knows of God the more truly and purely he loves Him. To the fulness of this blessedness you may all attain if you will begin by being watchful over your-

selves, when pleasures of a lower kind, but innocent, are around you. By curbing your natural selfishness; by attention to the wishes of others; by self-denial for the sake of Christ; by careful obedience to the commands of Him who died for you, you are forming your hearts to the love of God, which shall abide for ever. You are fitting yourselves to enjoy the happiness of heaven. You are cherishing within your hearts the seed of all heavenly dispositions, and mortifying the evil principles which would separate you from God. Your best shall come last; the water shall be turned into wine. The true principle of the heavenly life is in it even now. The Spirit is with the water. The heavenly wine has cleansed; the Holy Spirit is forming in you the mind of Christ; it will perfect you in God's own time.

The latter days shall be better for you than the beginning. The setting sun more glorious than the rising. The day of your death more joyful than the day of your birth. And *after* death, a vision of bliss too glorious for our feeble eyes to look upon, even in contemplation.

May our merciful Father safely guide our feeble steps along the way of holiness, through the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all glory and majesty, praise and dominion, for ever. Amen.

WHERE JESUS IS THERE IS NO DEATH.

ST. JOHN xi. 21.

*“ Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother
had not died.”*

THESE words were spoken in weakness. It was Martha who spoke them. The words were words of faith, for she believed that if Jesus had been there, He could have saved their brother from death; but they were also words of doubt and fear, for she had not realized that Jesus had the power to raise their brother even from the grave. Until this period Jesus had not shown His power to heal the sick in His absence from the patient. Yet Martha, on this occasion, and shortly afterwards, Mary used the same words, expressing an ETERNAL TRUTH. *Where Jesus is, there is no death*: for He is “the Resurrection and THE LIFE.” Where LIFE is, death CANNOT BE. At first she cannot grasp this great principle; but Jesus leads her gradually to comprehend His teaching. First, He says, “Thy brother shall rise again.” These words do not seem necessarily to refer to the

miracle that followed. "I *know* that he shall rise again at the last day." Belief in the resurrection existed among God's ancient people.* "In the resurrection," she says, "at the last day." It was a well-known truth, just as we now believe that we shall rise again. Therefore her confession of faith draws out the glorious declaration, "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE." This confession is the foundation of our faith, the Rock against which "the gates of HELL (the grave, or death) shall not prevail" (St. Matt. xvi. 18).

Behold Him, the Son of the living God! Who could not be shut within those doleful gates, except by His own consent. He came to burst the bars of death, and from the prison-house to exalt His faithful servants upon the heavenly thrones. He gives the promise: "He that believeth in Me, even though he have died (as did Lazarus), yet shall he live" the life eternal: and every one, still living (this *natural* life) and "believing in Me, shall not die for ever;" that is, he shall never REALLY die; he may pass through the grave and gate of death, but the second death shall never touch him. "Believest thou this?" It was of Martha that Jesus asked, and still he asks the question of us.

When you have brought your children to the font, or when you have answered on behalf of the children of your friends, have you not heard the

* *Vide* Job xix. 26.

solemn words, "Dost thou believe in the resurrection of the flesh ; and everlasting life after death ?" and you have answered for the little ones, " All this I steadfastly believe."

Again, most of you, my brethren, have heard by the grave of some relative or friend, the glorious words of immortal hope, " I am the Resurrection and the Life," saith the Lord. " He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live : and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." With these words of blessed assurance ringing in our ears (when we have a well-founded trust that our brother was at peace with God), we may commit the frail, long-suffering body of our brother to the ground, " in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Is it not that hope, and assured faith in our ever-living Saviour, which bears up the true servants of God, through years of patient suffering ?

Is it not (again) the same holy confidence which enables the Christian mother, in the prospect of death, to leave her little ones to the care of others, without a mother's guidance through the waves of this troublesome world ?

Oh ! how bright and beautiful is the light of a loving faith in our most loving Saviour !

Have not most of us held the place of Mary and Martha and their friends, near the grave of one of whom we trust that Jesus loved ? Let us, then,

imitate the faith of the sisters of Lazarus. Believe that Jesus has power over life, and over death. Even in *nature* "life triumphs over death." The individual plant decays, but more abundant life springs up to take its place. How much more is it true of life spiritual !

The teaching of mere nature is saddening. One of our own poets has expressed the feeling in simple but touching words—"So careful of the type," whereas the loveliest of nature's growth fades away.

To this fear, to this doubt, there is but one great all-availing answer: it is, "Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept." To prepare His disciples to receive the glorious tidings of the resurrection of their Lord, He had already raised *three* from the grave. The first was the little daughter of Jairus, of whom, in St. Mark's history, the father says, "My little daughter lieth at the point of death;" St. Luke writes, "She lay a dying;" while St. Matthew states, "My daughter is now dead." The second is of the "dead man, carried out, the only son of his mother, and she a widow." The third, the greatest miracle of all, is that of Lazarus, who "had lain in the grave four days already" (corruption begun): but even in this condition, Jesus, groaning in Himself, came to the grave. "It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, 'Take ye away the stone.' This word fulfilled, He lifted up His eyes, and said, Father, I thank

Thee that Thou hast heard Me And when He had spoken He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth: and he that was dead, came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Let him go." The warm life returned to the inanimate body: the lost brother was restored to the heart-broken sisters.

All these, and other such miracles, were wrought and recorded, in order to lead us on to that more glorious resurrection to an endless life.

" Jesus lives ! no longer now
 Can thy terrors, death, appal us.
 Jesus lives ! by this we know
 Thou, O grave, canst not enthrall us."

But the death of the body, and even the resurrection of the body, were but as nothing in comparison with the death and the resurrection of the soul.

To heal this mortal sickness ; to quicken those dead in trespasses and sins ; to raise the fallen ; to purify the unclean ; to give "repentance unto life" (Acts xi. 18) ; to kindle heavenly love in hearts long dead and cold :—that is the consummation of that wondrous life and death and resurrection, which we trace, year by year, from the cradle in Bethlehem, by the cross on Calvary—the awful death ; the glorious resurrection ; the triumphant ascension ; and the never-ceasing intercession of our Great High Priest.

Death temporal could have held no power over spiritual beings (whose life is the breath of God), had not life eternal been forfeited by sin. Therefore when Jesus says, "I am the Resurrection and the Life," He leads our thoughts far beyond a simple reunion of body and soul. The life that He gives is a new life; it is a life which renews the entire man; a life "after the image of Him that created him" (Col. iii. 10).

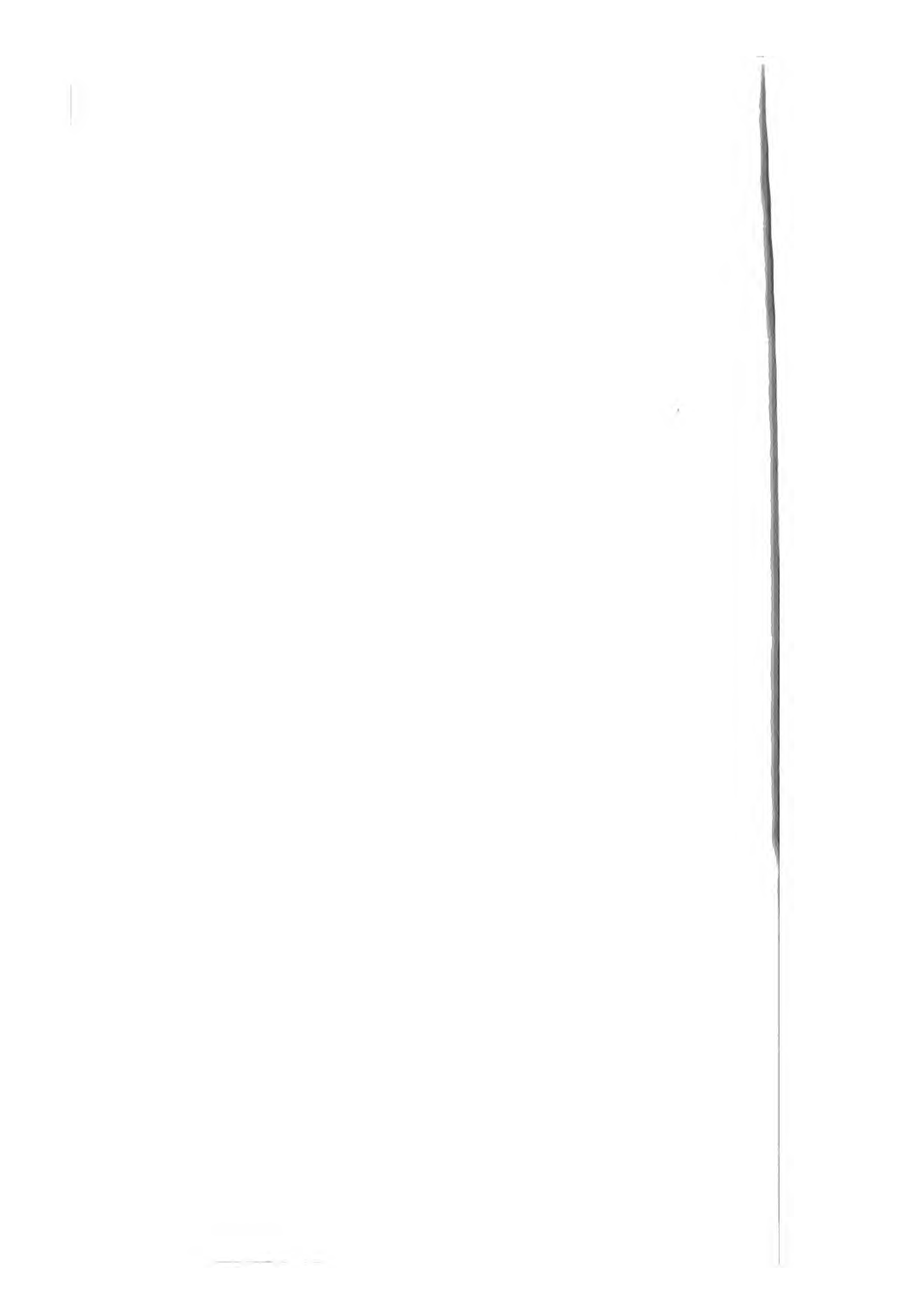
In this sense, then, take the words of the text: "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

If Christ be *here*; if He be with us; if He be in us by His Spirit, we shall not die: we shall not die the second death. Sin shall not have dominion over us; and therefore death has lost his terrors. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

Our new life depends upon the presence of Jesus. That presence is spiritual; we cannot now see Him with our bodily eyes, but we can see Him in the Gospels. We can "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest, the comfort of God's holy Word." We are allowed to rejoice, when "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." "We love Him because He first loved us." Henceforth may every true penitent say with St. Paul, "I live by the faith of the Son of God, *Who* loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Pray, therefore, that Christ, your risen Saviour,

be with you. With you in life, and with you in death; with you in your innocent pleasures; with you in your daily labours, either the labour of the mind, or the labour in the field. He is with you when your hearts are lifted towards heaven, to keep you humble. He is with you when temptation seems too strong for you. He is with you, to give you victory over the powers of darkness. He is with you when you are passing through the valley of death; with you when your bodies are in the grave, and your soul in Paradise; with you in the Resurrection day, to speak the glorious words, "Come, ye blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world."



JESUS SIGHING IN THE ACT OF HEALING.

ST. MARK VII. 34.

“Looking up to heaven, He sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.”

LEAVING the borders of Tyre and Sidon, where He had cast out a devil from the daughter of the Syrophœnician woman, Jesus came unto the coast of Decapolis, on the Sea of Galilee. There was brought to Him an unhappy man, deaf, and of imperfect speech. Jesus took him aside from the multitude, put his fingers into the ears of the sufferer, and He spit, and touched His tongue, and in the words of the text, “looking up to heaven, He sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.”

Let us dwell upon this feature of the miracle. Unloosing the tongue, Jesus looked up to heaven, and at the same time “*He sighed.*”

Similar signs of sorrow were manifested in His raising Lazarus from the grave; although joy was

2 JESUS SIGHING IN THE ACT OF HEALING.

to be the result of the miracle "*He wept*;" and on His way to the grave "*He groaned*." Sorrow was present to the Holy One, even in healing infirmity and in raising the dead.

"As man (says Bede), He groaned; as God, He cured."¹

If we ask why? 1. Because, there was before His eyes the general sentence of sorrow and death.

In the act of healing, He remembered disease. In restoring life, He knew that death would claim his own again. All the merciful deeds wrought by Jesus, bore witness to the curse which had fallen upon Adam and his descendants; they brought before Him the tears and sighs of many thousand sufferers for whom there was no comforter at hand. He was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," of whatever kind. His sympathy was a true sympathy, because He shared our humanity. He knew what man was before the fall; and therefore He knew what man might have been, if he had kept his first estate; but now, looking down the ages, hidden from us, but known to Jesus, He beheld the mutilated and ruined forms of man, created in the image of God—misshapen limbs, blinded eyes, deaf ears, leprous skins, death, and decay. All these (the fruit of sin) brought tears to the Man of sorrows. He knew that His miracles were but a brief suspension of the law of suffering and

¹ "Quasi homo ingemuit, quasi Deus curavit."

death: "In the world (He says) ye shall have tribulation" (St. John xvi. 33): they were but a short gleam before the cloud of gloom which overhung the sky of fallen man. Not all pains nor all sorrows were scattered by the rising of the Sun of Righteousness.

2. But it was not the mere suffering and sorrow that touched the tender heart of Jesus. These were but the visible consequences of sin. He saw sin as *the root of all human woes*. "Sin," which was "the sting of death;" sin, which imparted bitterness to sorrow; sin, which barbed the darts of anguish.

By *sin* came *death*, and all that tends to death—wounds and sores, fevers, pains, deafness, lameness, and all that blemishes the system and the form of man.

Our Lord frequently connects bodily ills with sin. "Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?" and again, in the case of the poor woman bowed down by infirmity eighteen years, Jesus declared that it was by Satan that she was bound for all those weary years (St. Luke xiii. 11—17).

It does not, however, follow that those who suffer most, have necessarily sinned most deeply. But still the principle remains, that even the saintliest suffer because of sin.

3. Once more, Jesus saw in *present* suffering a foreshadowing of the future doom; and in temporal death the death eternal. He knew—alas, too

4 JESUS SIGHING IN THE ACT OF HEALING.

well!—that in the case of many sufferers this was but the beginning of sorrows. He knew that in the sin which brings suffering *here*, was involved, for the impenitent, the never-dying worm *there*. There was, therefore, cause enough for the sighs, the groans, and the tears of the all-pitiful Redeemer, even in the act of healing. He realized it all, and felt it all, because He was to bear it all. He bowed His shoulder to the burden: “the Lord had laid on Him the iniquities of us all” (Isa. liii. 6). “The iron entered into His soul” (Ps. cv. 18). He also took upon Him the consequences of our sins: “He bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isa. liii. 4).

In the human sufferings which He relieved, He foresaw His own awful passion—the scourge, the crown of thorns, the cruel nails, the awful thirst: the still more awful hiding of His Father’s countenance, and the overshadowing of the second death, to be fulfilled in the final doom of the impenitent.

Oh! what a pathway of tribulation He traversed! “I have trodden the winepress alone (He cries); and of the people there was none with Me; . . . I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold” (Isa. lxiii. 3, 5).

It is good for us to meditate on the mystery of pain and grief, and sin and misery: for Jesus, even in the act of healing, *sighed*; and on His way to the grave of Lazarus He *groaned*, though He

knew that He was about to restore His "friend" to life.

Our meditations upon the tender sympathy of Jesus should not be a mere gaze of curiosity; but the tender sympathy of fellow-sufferers; and in the loving-kindness of heavenly charity.

In ministering to the sorrows and the sicknesses which afflict the souls and bodies of fallen men, Jesus sighed and wept.

We cannot heal the sick, as He could; still less can we restore the dead to life. But, thanks be to God, we have the power, in some cases, to mitigate the pains of the sufferer: and we are not walking in the footsteps of Jesus, unless we feel for, and with, the sufferers. True consolation is tender and full of sympathy. Those who have suffered themselves, can, no doubt, feel more tenderly for their fellow-sufferers: but if by God's mercy any of us have been spared much suffering, it is the more reason why we should not shun the sight of sufferings and sorrow in others. For in ministering to the wants of others, God will teach us how to prepare ourselves to meet those troubles which will sooner or later come. Then we, too, shall, in our turn, be comforted with that comfort of which God is the source. Man may, indeed, fail you. Those whom you have helped and cheered may have passed away: or, still sadder, some may have forgotten how you once cared for them, and have left you alone in your trouble. But Jesus can, in all circumstances, be touched with

the feeling of your infirmities ; and He will never leave you nor forsake you, if you will put your trust in Him. Let the consideration of the woes, and sorrows, and pains, and griefs of men make us feel how cursed a thing is sin, and so gain a deeper sense of what sin has done, and will do, if we allow it to hold us in its chains. Are you in dread of the power of sin?—fly to HIM who is the only healer of the deep wounds of sin. He may not heal the sick, as He healed the man sick of the palsy, nor raise the dead, as He raised Lazarus ; but He will surely save all true penitents from the eternal torment ; and deliver them from the second death.

If we seek him with all our hearts, He will break the fetters in which our souls are bound.

He will say ‘ Ephphatha ’ to tongues heretofore unused to worship, that we may glorify the Lord : and once more, with a better ‘ Ephphatha,’ Christ will roll back the eternal gates, that His obedient disciples may enter in.

Upon the cross our Saviour opened the gates of Paradise, that the penitent thief might enter in. Even so will He roll back the everlasting doors, that all true penitents may find a resting-place. This is our one and only hope in the hour of darkness, resembling, in its measure, the awful darkness which overshadowed Him, and drew forth that bitter cry, “ My God, my God, why hast Thou forgotten Me ? ”

The sorrows of the true servant of God are but

blessings in disguise, if they draw us nearer to our Lord, and bring us into humbler dependence upon Him.

He knows our weakness; He feels for our sufferings; He sympathizes with our sorrows. How, then, can we love, and thank, and trust Him as we ought?

Let us yield ourselves up to Him as a living sacrifice: then, come weal, come woe,—if HE be with us, we cannot perish.

ORIGINAL UPRIGHTNESS.

ISAIAH li. 1.

“Hearken to Me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.”

IN the awful struggle against sin, which every Christian is bound to carry on until he is taken to his rest, it is a great encouragement to look back to the time in which God formed man, first his body from “the dust of the ground,” and secondly, “breathed into his nostrils; and man became a living soul.”

First, then, we observe, that man was made by God, all Holy, all Wise. He came into being, not by chance, nor was it the work of an evil being: but by design, by the free-will, and for the sole glory of the Almighty.

Secondly, that as soon as man came into being, he was pronounced “very good;” that he was made in the image of God: in fact, that he was a perfect creature; perfect for the end for which he

was created. Hence it follows that sin is not of the substance of human nature; but that it is a bias of the will, a leaning from the upright, which may be rectified; a marring of God's image, which may be restored: capable of restoration, because he was once perfect.

This creation of a Being good, pure, upright, and the image of the Creator, made redemption possible; for had there been the slightest taint of sin in the newly-created being, redemption had been impossible. The Eternal Son could not have taken upon Himself that which was evil in itself.

Let us, then, dwell on this feature of man in his perfect condition; let us observe that even *then* all that was noble and glorious in him, his living soul, that which distinguished him from the beasts and other inferior creatures, *was received by the direct inspiration of the Creator.* "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. ii. 7). Therefore, we may say, with Elihu, "the Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life" (Job xxxii. 4).

As, therefore, the fact that man was originally good, inspires us with a hope of restoration, it encourages us, also, to work out our salvation, if with fear and trembling, yet with the might of God's Holy Spirit, working with our spirit. That man depends upon Him from whom the life came,

points out *how* we must look for that restoration ; even from Him who in the beginning gave to man the intelligence, the loving heart, the aspiring hope, the steadfast will. It turns us, for hope, to the Holy Ghost, the breath of God, who, in the darkness and confusion of chaos, moved upon the waters, and quickened the seeds of life, in whom we now believe as "the Lord, the Giver of Life."

To whom was this glorious revelation addressed? "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life ; and man became a living soul," the image of God.

Can we, struggling hard to break the chain of evil habits, bowed down by the burden of guilt, be partakers of that breath of life, bestowed upon our first parents in their innocence ?

Is it to mock us that we are told that "God breathed into the nostrils" of our forefathers, "and man became a living soul?"

No : for we are exhorted to cry, "Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope : even to-day do I declare that I will render double to you" (Zech. ix. 12).

Oh ! blessed be He who found for us a ransom ! The same God who created you by *His Word*, and breathed His Spirit within you, redeems you by the blood of His dear Son, recreates and revivifies you by the same Spirit, the Life Giver.

"Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire.

Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who dost thy seven-fold gifts impart.
Thy blessed unction from above,
Is comfort, life, and fire of love."

That voice which called man into being from the dust can restore the soul that cleaveth to the dust.

Many voices fall dead and cold upon the ear of those who have been long sunk in evil habits, as if they feel themselves like hopeless slaves; but O, my brethren, let not this gracious voice be unheard or unheeded!

"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Rev. xxi. 7). "For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. iii. 22, 23). Wonderful words of promise! His promise who cannot lie: His promise is fulfilled in His beloved children, in the state of grace: but more gloriously will it be fulfilled "when He shall appear," when "we may have confidence," when "we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John ii. 28; iii. 2).

Look back, then, to the innocence, to the bliss of Eden, and look forward to the new and more glorious Eden—"a new heaven and a new earth." "The first heaven and the first earth are passed away." "Behold! the tabernacle of God is with

men, and He will dwell with them." Jesus has trod the earth, and all His true disciples shall be His people: for He is "Emmanuel, God with us." "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. xxi. 4); and "whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die" (St. John vi. 26). "I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord."

Turn then, dear brethren, to the source of all life, for renewed life—a life which defies death.

There is indeed a terrible power in spiritual death. The "sin unto death" lays hold upon the entire man. Not one among us can raise himself from that deadly sickness. But He who first gave life can restore life. The good is stronger than the evil. God is greater than the devil. God's work came first, the *perfect* work, and man was good. The devil's work came afterwards to spoil the good. Man fell, and *death* began to work in him: but the Maker is greater than the spoiler. Life triumphs over death. God still breathes the breath of life into those who believe in Christ.

Here, too, is our hope for our dear departed ones, and for ourselves in the prospect of death. The breath of God cannot be lost. The body may be laid in the grave; the flesh may become the food of worms; but the Immortal Spirit never dies. "The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them" (Tobit

xii. 7); and the frail body also, since it has been made the dwelling-place of the Immortal Spirit (the breath of God) shall be restored by the same quickening power. The scattered particles of dust shall, when God so wills, be re-united; the breath of His Spirit shall restore them to life again, and, created anew in the image of their glorified Redeemer, they shall again be the dwelling-places of the purified Spirit; and soul and body shall unite together in endless praises of Him who first breathed into their nostrils the breath of life, then visited him by His grace in his fallen state, and finally restored him, in the image of Christ's Resurrection, to Eternal Life.

O, then, let us shrink back with horror from sin, lest we defile that which has been cleansed in the blood of Christ; lest we drive out that Holy Spirit of God which breathed into us the new life, when we were baptized in the thrice holy Name.

God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul: even so God breathes into us His Holy Spirit, to renew in us the image of God.

Let us guard and watch carefully over that precious treasure. Watch and pray. Pray for strength to overcome the tempter, and watch against his cunning devices. Keep far from bad companions; and if you are tempted to do wrong when you are alone, then try to find a trusty friend who will encourage you, advise you, and set a good

example to you, and having found a treasure so precious, let each of you try to help each other to live as Christians ought to live.

Never be idle. Find some useful employment, and encourage each other to seek for the highest and holiest knowledge.

And when the devil sees you, combining together and helping each other to improve, he is afraid of you: or rather he is afraid of ONE WHO is always with you, when you are in the way of duty; and so you may escape many temptations which would come upon you if you wasted your time with idle companions, or if you loiter in idleness: for when you have nothing to do, the Devil will soon find employment for you!

But there is a higher and better companionship than any that I have yet mentioned. I mean "the communion of the saints."

Ten days after our Saviour had ascended into heaven, His disciples were all, with one accord, in one place: and suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty rushing wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting, and there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost."

Even so, when we meet together with one accord, in one place, in this house, consecrated to God's Holy service, *we too*, kneeling upon our knees—praying earnestly that God would forgive us our sins, and renew us in all goodness, then

the Holy Ghost will fall upon us. The breath of God which first gave us life, will renew that life, and give us more love, and more earnestness, and more power to live as God's dear children. And, above all, when we kneel side by side in the Holy Communion, and are made partakers of His blessed body and blood, "we are one with Christ, and Christ with us." He, then, is *all in all* to us. "The first man, Adam, was a living soul:" but this "second Adam," our Lord Jesus Christ, "is a quickening Spirit." We, therefore, live a new life in Him; or rather, He liveth in us. No longer, then, does He *breathe* life into us, but He Who is the life itself dwells within us, and we in Him, so that we may say with St. Paul (Gal. ii. 20), "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

These glorious words do not belong to the great apostle only, but to every poor man or woman, and to every boy or girl who fights against the devil, and tries to keep God's commandments. Every one of you may, if you will, say, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

In that life, then, fight against principalities and against powers: against the persuasions of bad companions, and against your own evil inclinations: and then you will be "more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Rom. viii. 37).

CHRIST'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE HEART.

PSALM CXXXIX. 23, 24.

“Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart : prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well if there be any wickedness in me : and lead me in the way everlasting.”

THERE is but One who knows the heart of man : One only, who can trace its subtle windings. Wisely, therefore, did the Psalmist cry, “Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart : prove me and examine my thoughts.”

The inmost working of the heart of man is not wholly revealed, even to the nearest and dearest. Love alone unlocks the inner thought : but as man, by his fall, has lost perfect love, he cannot perfectly respond to love Divine.

Hence, many complain that they are not understood. “The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.” But this is not all. The heart does not even know itself. If a friend, in kindness, points out a fault, the answer will (with few exceptions) be, “Any fault but that.” We see this ignorance of self in

others: let us all, therefore, earnestly cry, "O cleanse Thou me from my secret faults."

"Know thyself," said the ancient sage. He had learnt his liability to be deceived. If *he* felt how great was the danger of self-deception, with how much more assurance should *we* pray, "Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart: prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well if there be any wickedness in me: and lead me in the way everlasting."

I. Consider, therefore, the misery of man in his natural condition: "Without God in the world!" How much more miserable, then, is the condition of those who have been baptized into Christ, and have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," and yet have not kept God's commandments, but have sinned against the light? If the disease is unknown to ordinary physicians, why should not the poor deluded patient seek the true physician of souls, and be healed?

This ignorance prepares the way to the entry of the seven other spirits, worse than the first.

Saul laid his fault upon the people. Even Judas Iscariot, probably, persuaded himself that he was not committing a deadly sin in betraying his Lord, knowing that Jesus had the power to escape. The Pharisee, when he said, "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are," spoke in ignorance of his true misery.

Religious people, anxious to live a holy life, are not, *as a matter of course*, conscious of their

faults. St. Peter, though forewarned by Jesus of his coming fall, could not believe that he would so soon fall grievously. Ignorance of our inborn weakness hardens the heart against repentance. Bystanders can see it: but the miserable self-deceiver, even when the fault is laid before him, cannot understand it, crying, "any fault but this!"

II. What, then, is the cure of this spiritual blindness? Awful as it is, *God's knowledge is our only refuge*. The all-piercing eye of God Almighty can alone fathom the depth of human self-deception. To Him, therefore, with all humility let us betake ourselves, and say with the Psalmist, "O Lord, Thou hast searched me out, and known me: Thou knowest my down-sitting, and mine uprising. Thou understandest my thoughts long before." "Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart: prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look if there be any way of wickedness in me: and lead me in the way everlasting." Even without our prayer, God knows our necessities. He sees the remedy, and is ready to help us: but it is good for us that we beseech Him to search and try our hearts, for our own sake, that He may bring out the true heavenly knowledge, and quicken our spiritual sight. With the holy Augustin, let us pray, "Take me, O God, from behind my back, and put me before my face." "Let me see myself as Thou seest me." "Look well and see if there be any way of wickedness in

me," that I may abhor it, and cast it out, and so "lead me in the way everlasting."

Jesus says, "I am the way:" "by Me if any man enter in, he shall go in and out, and find pasture." "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it: but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall be found there."

The prayer of the text, then, is most practical. It is the prayer of self-examination. Using it in earnest, we come to the light, that we may know the truth. We may lay bare our wounds before the Great Physician, the only healer of our souls.

Why, then, should any troubled penitent fear to use the words of the Psalmist? "Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart: prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me: and lead me in the way everlasting."

Why should we not go to the Source of all light and truth, that the darkness of self-deception may be chased away?

Alas! it is a prayer too hard to be used by the natural man. It is a prayer which thousands are afraid to use, and why? Because they are not prepared for a *heart-whole* service. They do not really wish to know *themselves*. "They love

darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil." They shun the light, lest their deeds should be reprov'd; those deeds which they are not prepared to give up at the bidding of their Saviour.

The prayer of the text involves a full, thorough determination to forsake sin: *especially* the besetting sin. "I WILL run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou hast set my heart at liberty."

Light and liberty go together. If we earnestly desire to escape from the power of sin, let us pray for the light of God's searching eye.

Thank God! He loves us *better* than we do ourselves. When He sees us hesitating between temptation and conscience, He comes in by His providence; showing us "that He is not willing that any should perish." He tries us, and sifts us, and winnows us by troubles, and sorrows, and disappointments. He will not allow us to be happy in ignorance of our sins; nor will He allow us to be ignorant of our weakness.

How sore the trial is, some of you have known by experience. But the trial is sent in love, if we will in lowly submission "bear the rod, and Who hath appointed it" (Micah vi. 9).

All suffering is the punishment of sin; but if the suffering is received patiently and humbly, the punishment is swallowed up in mercy. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation."

When there is a willing mind, the grace of God co-operates with His providence.

The Spirit of God (like the angel in the fire with the three holy children), "as it had been a moist whistling wind, cools the flame of trial, so that the fire touched them not at all, neither hurt nor troubled them" (Apocrypha, Dan. 27).

Lastly. If you are willing to offer the prayer, "Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart: prove me and examine my thoughts," while you ask God to try and search your hearts, try and search yourselves. Lay before Him your failures, your fears, your doubts. If you are perplexed, seek guidance of those who have had experience in the way of God's commandments. Ask advice and help from those who are set to watch for your souls. They may be below you in knowledge of the heavenly life, and yet by the grace of God they may be enabled to see in you what you cannot see in yourself.

If you truly desire to know yourselves, God will not leave you in darkness; but in the light of His love, we can say,

"Lead Thou me on; I do not ask to see
The distant scene: one step enough for me."

THE SELF-DECEPTION OF TIMID SINNERS.

1 KINGS xxi. 20.

“ Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee; because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord.”

THE character of Ahab is perhaps more despicable than any other of which we read in Holy Scripture.

Jezebel, indeed, is hateful. Her name has become a by-word to express the awful depths of wickedness into which it is possible for women to fall; but the man who can turn his face to the wall, lie still, and let his wife sin for him, is utterly base and contemptible: and this, not merely in the eyes of his fellow-men, but in the sight of God also; for we read that, “There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself, and work wickedness in the sight of the Lord.” Yet the character of Ahab is by no means rare, especially in a peaceful age, and among a civilized people. There are thousands who would revolt with horror from

Jezebel's open defiance of every law, human and Divine, who yet would allow themselves to be drawn on gradually towards evil, by the influence of a character bolder than their own ; who would, if I may use the expression, *slide* smoothly into great iniquities, though they durst not openly transgress a plain command ; and so would in reality incur the guilt of sin, without the overt act, which would alarm the conscience.

Let us endeavour to trace the course of such feeble souls.

1. In the first place, they set their affections upon some seeming good, as Ahab did upon Naboth's vineyard. The simple desire of gain or pleasure is stirred within them.

The next step is to try all lawful means to obtain their wish. Failing this, they are, like Ahab, heavy and displeased.

To sin boldly, and secure the object on which their hearts are set ; *no*, this is not their way. They have a soul to be saved. They cannot go flat against the commandments of God. They fear the consequences of deliberate transgression ; they may die in their sin, and so be finally lost. Even higher motives may restrain them : they do not wish to do wrong. They dread the self-condemnation which would mar their peace of mind, and destroy their self-respect, if they were to commit the gross act of sin.

What then remains ? Will they at once give up their cherished wish, and turn their thoughts

from the alluring gain? Will they then yield up their own will to the will of God? No; this is not their way either. They lie down heavy and displeased. They neither seize the coveted pleasure, nor turn away from the temptation; but pause and ponder over the hardship of the case. They review it in all its bearings, and consider with themselves whether some way may not remain by which they can secure the prize without the deed of evil, and bemoan the hardship of the self-denial, if no way of escape appears. Then follows an envious admiration of bolder sinners, and a cowardly regret that their own conscience is so easily alarmed. Alas! they cease to *hate* the sin, and are only restrained by fear of the pain that follows sin. For such a double heart the devil has always some middle course open. The mountains of difficulty may indeed appear for some time to close up every way of exit from the doubts, and fears, and wishes, which encompass the waverer: but let him only tamper with his conscience long enough, change his point of view often enough, and he will discover some path which seems to avoid the precipice of sin on one side, and the upward steps of self-denial on the other. A stronger will, a bolder spirit, is at hand to take the responsibility of action. Ahab had his wife—(you, perhaps, have a daring, high-spirited, thoughtless companion)—then the miserable coward, who feared to do the vile deed himself, is ready to take advantage of the deed when done.

Ahab durst not murder Naboth : it is doubtful whether he would have allowed his wife to do it, if he had known for certain what course she was about to pursue ; but having lain quiet, and allowed her to do as she chose, without inquiry whether she did well or ill, he took, without fear, his neighbour's vineyard, the price of innocent blood.

In like manner, among those whose trial is severe poverty, there are some who would not steal, themselves, and yet would partake of stolen goods without inquiry. And among those who are engaged in trade or business, are found men who would not themselves overreach, or defraud, who yet would connive at the frauds of their partners or agents. Is it not almost proverbial that companies are more lax in their principles than individuals ?

How few, again, are those who would wilfully lead others astray, compared with the numbers who would follow an evil example, without much fear !

But we may observe further, that it is very possible to be thus self-deceived, or to secure the wages of iniquity, without seeming wilfully to commit it, apart from another's agency.

Conscience may be soothed and flattered without the aid of a human voice. The true Ahab does not always need a Jezebel to lead him on. If the love of sin be cherished—if the love of God be absent—he has a worse than Jezebel within him.

It was not by the persuasion of Jezebel that Ahab despised the prophet's warning (1 Kings xxii. 28—30), and went up to the battle, in which God had said that he should die. It was not Jezebel who induced him to ease the fear which the warning inspired, by disguising himself, while Jehosaphat went to battle in his kingly garments, as if he could, by an exchange of raiment, escape the all-seeing eye.

In the two cases we see the same cowardly attempt to take a middle course between right and wrong. In the one case, there was enough of the fear of God to restrain him from violence and rapine; but not enough to induce him to abstain from receiving the prize of perjury and murder, committed in his behalf. In the other, he had sufficient faith in the words of the Lord's prophet to make him fear an open exposure of himself in his kingly robes, and yet sufficient unbelief to allow him to trust himself in the forbidden battle-field, under disguise. In the one case the instrument of self-deception was his wife, in the other his own duplicity of heart.

So, too, with us, if we have no Jezebel, no hardened companion, to do the evil deed for us, the subtle spirit within, will (if we permit) show us some by-way of iniquity, which will lead us to the same end as if we had taken the high road, with this advantage, that our doubts and fears are quieted.

For example, a certain advantage is set before

you, which can be gained by telling a falsehood: but you draw back, for you remember that "all liars shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone" (Rev. xxi. 8). You wait awhile, and find that no questions will be asked—you have but to hold your peace, and the same end will be gained.

Surely a voice within will whisper that you ought to speak the truth, a voice which you might hear if you wished to hear; but it does not speak so loud as it would against the open falsehood, and therefore you do not heed it, and perhaps congratulate yourself that you have escaped the sin of lying. But if you take to yourself the fruit of this unspoken deception, then *the silence is in the sight of God a lie*.

This moral cowardice is still more common in sins of omission. How many duties are left undone, how many opportunities of kindness lost, not from any formal determination to omit the duties, or to refuse the kindness; but from an indolent forgetfulness or procrastination? The time is allowed to slip by, the opportunity is lost, and miserable hypocrites as we are, a sense of relief too often follows. Alas! we are but too ready to "go down and take possession."

And yet, my brethren, how vain and foolish are all such self-deceptions! Surely it were far better to look sin boldly in the face, see all its true hideousness, and reject it courageously.

Sin embraced with averted eyes is not the less

sin, nor are its ways less certainly death. The cowardly sinner is not therefore the less hateful because he is also contemptible; nor will he find himself in the end the less corrupted by sin, but rather the more so.

For what is the natural result of all this dallying with evil, this shrinking from the guilt of iniquity, while attempting to enjoy its rewards? The end is well set forth in the words of Ahab to the saintly prophet, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"

Truly "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." "No man *can* serve two masters." God will in the end find us, as He found Ahab. Ahab He found by His servant Elijah. He will find us by our conscience, if not by the ministry of another. For, after all, we do not really deceive ourselves. There is no true peace, no enjoyable security, to the double-hearted. Deep in the soul there is a hidden fear, which in moments of sudden danger, or in the deep silence of the night, thrills the whole being with terror. Then the voice of conscience will be heard; or rather God Himself is heard, uttering His solemn warning in the conscience; and oh! misery of all miseries, if to the perverted heart it should come as the voice of an "enemy."

See, then, my brethren, the whole course of the self-deceiving cowardly spirit, which fears to sin. See and beware. The end of that course is enmity with God. The whole progress of it is a

selling of thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord.

The bold man *gives* himself freely to work iniquity with greediness. The coward *sells* himself; he makes his wretched bargain; he yields himself up slowly and unwillingly. The price he asks is *to be persuaded* to go up (1 Kings xxii. 20—22); to be eased of his fears; to have his doubts solved; his scruples satisfied; the way of evil made smooth. He asks to be lulled, and soothed, and put to sleep in the way of death. He says, "Speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits" (Isa. xxx. 10). He asks his price, and obtains it. But, having obtained it, he has *sold himself*. His immortal soul is doomed, his trust in God is broken, his hopes of heaven are shipwrecked. He is a miserable slave to the worst of masters; and it is a great question whether he is not more hopelessly bound than even a bolder transgressor.

Beware, therefore, dear brethren, of the first movements of self-deception. Beware of continuing to long for pleasures or gains which cannot be had without sin. Be honest and large-hearted; and give up freely *and once for all* what God in His providence, or by His law, has forbidden.

The fear of sin is God's precious gift bestowed upon you in mercy, to save you from enduring in reality the terrors of His wrath.

But if you yield to that fear, just so much as

will induce you to sin with closed eyes, sin with a trembling heart, sin by the bold deed or lying word of another, then you make yourself (in the sight of God and His angels) mean, wretched, and cowardly, as was Ahab.

But if you let that wholesome fear rule your heart and guide your ways; and if it keep you back from the sin, and turn your heart again into the way of God's commandments, then it will be in you the beginning of true wisdom; it will free you from every other fear, and bring you into willing subjection to Him whose service is perfect freedom. It will make you the friend of God; for does not our blessed Lord say, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you"?

It will give you the true courage, that courage which fears not to fight "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. vi. 12); and it will give you that true wisdom which will secure you from the wiles of the wicked one, and guard you from the illusions of your deceitful heart.

THE TRANSFIGURATION.

ST. LUKE ix. 33, 34.

Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said. While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud.

THERE is one event in the history of our Blessed Lord which stands apart from all the other events recorded by the Evangelists. It was transacted upon earth, yet represented the glories of heaven, so that it unites in one view the actual bodily presence of Christ upon earth, with the glorious bliss of heaven, which, in our very humanity, He was to enjoy for ever.

The scene of the Transfiguration is related at length by three of the Evangelists. It is alluded to in the fourth gospel, by St. John, in the words, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (St. John i. 14), and it

is distinctly mentioned by St. Peter * in his Second Epistle. “ We were eyewitness of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, ‘ This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount.”

We may here observe, in passing, one of those remarkable coincidences which are found in true histories (but seldom, if ever, in fictitious)—coincidences which so strongly corroborate the Divine records, and demonstrate their objective reality.

In the history of the Transfiguration, St. Peter says, “ Let us make three *tabernacles*” † (St. Luke ix. 33). In his second epistle (i. 14) he writes, “ Shortly I must put off this *tabernacle*.” ‡ Again, in the history of the Transfiguration we are told that our Lord spake of His *decease*. §

St. Peter, in his epistle, immediately after using the word *tabernacle*, mentions his approaching *decease* (ἐξόδον); and then he at once proceeds to speak of our Lord’s *Transfiguration*, as if the sight of those two words, σκηνὰς and ἐξόδον—the words which he himself had used and heard years ago, upon the holy mount—had recalled the glorious vision to his mind.

To return to the subject of the Transfiguration.

* 2 Peter i. 16—18.

† σκηνώμα.

‡ σκηνάς.

§ ἐξόδον.

This foreshowing of the glory about to be revealed was granted only to the three favoured disciples, St. Peter, St. James, and St. John; who were also the only witnesses of the raising of Jairus's daughter.

These three disciples were afterwards to be the companions of our Saviour in *His deepest humiliation, the agony in the garden*; and we can scarcely doubt that these peculiar privileges were granted to them as a preparation to sustain them through that awful scene, so severe a test of their faith it must have been. To them, also, it is expressly related that our Lord appeared, after His *resurrection*; and, as they were the principal witnesses to the reality of that marvellous event, so, doubtless, they revealed the glorious vision upon the Mount to their fellow-disciples, as they have left their record of it, for our instruction.

I. First, then, let us recount the wonderful events themselves. "*The fashion of His countenance was altered.*" "*His face did shine as the sun,*" irradiated by the Divine glory, which ordinarily was concealed by the veil of His humility, but which now, for a few moments, shone forth in its proper splendour. Then "*there appeared unto Him Moses and Elias:*" one representing the law, the other the prophets; one appearing from "*the dead,*" the other from the unseen world, into which he had passed without dying.

"Ask thee a sign," said the Lord to Ahaz (Isa. vii. 11). "*Ask it either in the depth, or in*

the height above." *Here* it is given from *both*: —Moses coming from "the depth," *Hades*, the resting-place of departed spirits; Elias from the height of heaven, whither he had been carried up in the chariot of fire.

When the Pharisees asked of Jesus a sign, it was refused. "No sign" (said our Lord) "shall be given to this generation;" but *to the loving disciples* a sign was given *unasked*.

Both of these Old Testament saints, Moses and Elias, thus called to be with Christ in His Transfiguration, had, like their Saviour, endured a forty-days' fast; both had seen a vision upon the Mount; and both had been mysteriously removed from earth: one without passing through the gate of death, the other by death, indeed, but alone upon the mountain-top, and without the ordinary rites of sepulture.

But *now*, in glorified bodies, as the first-fruits of the dead and the living, these favoured saints are called upon to share His glory, and to hold converse with Him concerning His decease, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. And having thus appeared, and done Him homage, they retire, leaving to Him their delegated and expiring powers.

Jesus is left alone! The Law and the Prophets are fulfilled; the Gospel alone remains, the new, life-giving law of the Christian covenant.

As Moses and Elias disappear the approving voice is heard (as it had already been heard at

His Baptism), "*This is My beloved Son.*" "*God, who had in times past spoken to the Fathers by the prophets,*" was now, in these last days, about to speak "*unto us by His Son.*" "*Hear Him.*"

The Law and the Prophets no longer exist in themselves; they are fulfilled in HIM whom the men of old foreshadowed.

The Transfiguration will strike us more vividly, if we consider that it took place by *night*.

Jesus went up into the mountain to pray: it was His custom to do so by night. The disciples were "*heavy with sleep,*" * yet, notwithstanding, keeping awake, † "*they beheld His glory,*" until, at the break of day, they descended into the plain.

II. Let us now pass on to the result of this glorious vision upon the apostles.

(1) "*Lord, it is good for us to be here.*" It was Peter who spoke, ever ready in his loving zeal.

(2) "*Let us*" (he said) "*make three tabernacles; one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias.*" He would fain have remained there for ever with his glorified Lord, in perpetual splendour; but "*he knew not what he said.*" For then, how could the Scripture have been fulfilled, that Messiah should be cut off? No; He must first go down into the valley of humiliation; He must drink of the cup which His Father was preparing for Him; He must accomplish His decease at Jerusalem.

For Peter also, and his fellow-disciples, it could

* βεβαρημένοι.

† διαγρηγορήσαντες.

not be good to remain upon the Mount of Transfiguration when Jesus had left it. Besides, for Peter, and James, and John, there was also a work to be accomplished—the deepening of repentance, the ripening of faith, the perfecting of love.

The *external* glory would have been nothing to them, until their heart and mind and soul had been prepared, by the Holy Spirit of God, to receive the fulness of joy. Therefore, *while he thus spake*, “a cloud”—“a bright cloud,” says St. Matthew—“overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud;” and when they heard the Voice, “they fell on their faces, and were sore afraid.” They knew not, indeed, what they said. The awful presence in the cloud overwhelmed them. To hear the Father’s voice they were not as yet prepared, without overwhelming awe.

But most mercifully and tenderly were they comforted. By the gracious touch, and by the loving voice of the Son, they were raised up, and reassured. “Behold an Hand touched me,” said the prophet Daniel (ch. x. 8—11), “and set me upon my knees, and upon the palms of my hands;” and (after the ascension of the Lord) St. John tells us how, in the hour of extreme fear under the shadow of death, He (the gracious Saviour) laid His right hand upon the apostle, saying, “Fear not: understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright.”

Dear brethren, in this wonderful scene there is a lesson for us.

It *was* good for the disciples to be there upon the Mount, for JESUS took them thither. It was *not* good for them to stay there, for *He brought them down* again.

So, also, it is good for us to follow the gracious steps of our merciful Saviour in all His loving labours for our salvation. It is good for us to see Him by faith, in His life, His work, His almighty power, and His great glory; it is good for us to ascend the mount by contemplation, and gaze, with loving thankfulness, upon *His* glory, "who covereth Himself with light as with a garment" (Ps. civ. 2).

But it is also good for us to return again to earthly occupations, *as duty calls us*.

The *practical* life and the *contemplative* life must move on side by side, with even steps. Neither must be despised, lest, on the one hand, we should become mere idealists—looking upwards towards heaven, and yet taking no heed to walk in the narrow way of strict obedience, which leads to the home of eternal life; or, on the other hand, there is danger lest, while carefully fulfilling the *letter* of God's commandments, we should grow cold and dead in spirit, because we do not lift up our hearts unto the Lord, and kindle the flame of love within us, by the contemplation of His love.

Nothing can satisfy the immortal soul, short of seeing Him in His glory. We must learn to say,

with St. Paul, "*To me to live is Christ : to die is gain.*"

It is a glorious hope that is set before us, the life eternal in the heavens ; and it must be "*good for us*" to be *there*, by anticipation, where Jesus is ! Such as He *was*, radiant with celestial light, all mortal weakness consumed by the glory ineffable, such shall we be hereafter, if we enter into His rest ; for, "when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." "The resurrection bodies of the saints will resemble that of their Lord. They too shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father ; when that which was sown in corruption shall have been raised in incorruption, and that which was sown in weakness shall have been raised in power, and that which was sown in dishonour shall have been raised in *glory.*"*

"For," says the Apostle (Philip. iii. 20, 21), "our citizenship" (or our conversation, or our home) "is in heaven ; from whence also we look for our Lord Jesus Christ : who shall change our vile body (or the body of humiliation), that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body," or "His body *of glory.*"

And oh ! my brethren, how unutterable will that bliss be !

If Peter could exclaim, "It is good for us to be here," though he had but a glimpse of the glory of Christ, how infinitely "good" will it be to *be*

* Dean Goulbourn.

in heaven, and to remain *there*, where there is no need of the sun nor of the moon to lighten it, *for* the Lamb is the light thereof! How shall we then be filled with joy, when we "shall be for ever with the Lord!"

Surely it is good for us thus to foretaste the glory that shall be revealed! It is good for us to be *HERE*, in God's house of prayer; it is good for us to dwell upon the glorious beauty of our Incarnate Saviour; to see Him, as the three favoured ones saw Him on the Mount.

And, thanks be to God, we may *at home* renew the glorious vision. We may come into that radiant presence in the quiet seclusion of our own chambers.

Our Lord, we are told by St. Luke, "took with Him Peter and James and John, and went up into a mountain to pray; and as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered." Even so by prayer we come most truly and sacredly into the presence of His glorious Majesty. The fashion of the Christian's countenance is altered by earnest prayer; the glory of Christ is reflected from the features of His servants when they pray in His name. The light of His spirit in their hearts shines out; and if we could see them, as the Jews of old saw St. Stephen, we should see *their* faces also as the faces of angels.

It is good for us, then, to be *there* upon our knees, to see the glory of Christ, and to reflect in ourselves the beams of His love.

But the holiest Christian does not spend his life upon his knees. Not even the eagle's piercing eye can gaze upon the sun for ever. Much less can we, fallen creatures, bear *perpetual* contemplation of Divine glory and bliss. We return again, *therefore, according to God's will*, to our daily toils, our homely trials; but we return *refreshed* and *strengthened*; we do our work with a bright face and a light heart; the Saviour of blessing overspreads and sanctifies the common incidents of life. And if, as the three disciples had soon afterwards to follow their Lord to His agony, and to pass with Him, fearing and trembling, through the valley of the shadow of death; if, I say, we are called upon to pass through the dark valley in our own persons, or to watch beside any of our beloved ones in the awful passage, the glorious vision will have so penetrated the soul, that even if the light *be not clear*, neither shall it be dark; but, in the words of the prophet, "it shall come to pass that in the evening time it shall be light" (Zech. xiv. 6, 7).

Let us pray for each other, that we may patiently walk in the narrow way, and persevere to the end. Let us pray, that in all our daily toils and cares and fears, we may see Jesus by a living faith in His glory; and so be gradually prepared to live with Him for ever.

GOD, THE GOD OF THE LIVING.

ST. MATTHEW xxii. 32.

“I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”

To be God's child is to *live*: nothing else is worth the name of life. To eat and to drink, to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, and then to go away into the darkness of spiritual death—this is not worth the name of life.

“Let us enjoy life,” says the young man; which means, “Let us take pleasure as it comes, without considering whether it be right or wrong, without asking God's guidance and God's blessing.” Alas! it is the pathway of death. “He goeth . . . straightway, as an ox to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks. . . . As a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life” (Prov. vii. 22).

“Let us make money,” says the merchant or the trader. “Let us make us a great name.” “Let us teach men a higher philosophy,” says the

learned man. "Let us obtain place and power," says the politician.

But what will money avail us, if we fear to meet our God? And where shall we find refuge when we stand before the throne of the Almighty Judge? What will it profit us to have known all human sciences, if we know not "the love of God, that passeth knowledge?"

Pleasure, and the comforts of life, and influence are indeed blessings, for which we may thank God, if we take them as His gifts, to be accepted and used according to his laws; but what gain are they, if sin has dominion over us? for then we are dead in the sight of God. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Therefore if we are "dead in trespasses and sins," we are "strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Ephes. ii. 12).

And what, my brethren, can be so miserable as to be "without God?" "Without God" in our daily life! "Without God" when we lie down, perhaps to wake no more! "Without God" when we rise up, to go through our daily work without God's blessing! "Without God" to sanctify our joys. "Without God" to comfort us in our sorrows. "Without God" to sustain us in the awful hour of death: and when the hour of death is over, oh! how fearful will it be to pass into the unseen world "without God!" the lonely soul in the darkness of the sleep of death, apart from God! and in the resurrection day (without the

intervention of the Mediator) to meet the awful Judge! to hear the eternal doom! the blackness of darkness for ever!

See then, dear brethren, that your life be REAL. Pray earnestly that God may help you to live as a Christian ought to live—"in soberness and chastity," in honesty and kindness, in love and gentleness.

Strive earnestly to do your duty towards God, to believe in Him, to fear Him, and to love Him, with all your heart and mind and soul and strength; to worship Him in church, and to worship Him at home; to "give Him thanks" for every blessing; to "call upon Him," that is, to ask of Him what you require, as a loving child does to a loving father; "to honour His holy name and His word: His name with reverence; His word, to read, mark, and learn, and humbly to obey its precepts. Then will He be your God, for you will be His *living* child. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

And if you live *as the child of God*; if God is your God, the God and Father of you, a *living child*, it will be your delight to "love your neighbour as yourself, and to do to all men as you would they should do unto you." Then you will be good and kind to your aged parents; you will reverence all those in authority, ordained by God; you will be gentle and considerate for others; you will be true and honest; you will speak kindly and truly of your neighbour; you will be honest

and industrious, and contented with the state of life in which God has placed you.

GOD IS THE GOD OF THE LIVING. If we desire Him to be our God, we must live a *true, pure* life, a life in accordance with God's will, for any other life is not worth the name. Our life must be that new life which God has given us in Jesus Christ. We must be able to say, in our measure, as St. Paul said, "*The life which I now live in the flesh; I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.*" If our life is not a *true* life, then we are of all men most miserable; and for this reason: *ever since our childhood we have known God's love* in Jesus Christ. We have called God our Father; we have known Jesus as our Saviour; if, therefore, we are, after all, dead in sin; if we have no true love for Him who died for us upon the Cross; if we are selfish, cold-hearted, and disobedient, *then we are twice* dead; not only "born in sin, and the children of wrath," as all men are by nature, but we shall have thrown away the gift of God—the new heavenly life which He had bestowed upon us in Jesus Christ.

Let us therefore examine ourselves, and make confession to our Father, and plead His mercies through Jesus Christ. *As* Jesus healed men's sicknesses, and strengthened their feeble limbs, and even restored the dead to life, *so* He will heal you of the sickness of sin, if only you will lay your wounds open before Him. Go to Him, and He

will teach you how to overcome temptation ; He will strengthen your feeble resolutions, and give you new life by His Spirit. Then you will know that God is *your God*.

He is "the God of the *living*." If you truly repent ; if you try earnestly to do better ; if you fight against and overcome the tempter, then you will be as one restored from the death unto sin, and you will partake of the life of righteousness. You will *live* before God. He is the God of the living. The little ones, newly washed in the precious blood of Christ, receive His gift of *life* : *God is their God*. Young men and women who guard their purity, keeping under their body, and bringing it into subjection, live in His sight : God is their God. Industrious labourers, good fathers, dutiful wives, honest men of business, doing their several duties in the fear and love of God, *live before Him* : *He is their God*. Patient sufferers, aged saints of God, awaiting the hour of their departure, yet ready to remain, if it be God's will, are living though dying : *God is their God*. And those who have departed this life in the fear and love of God—they too live. " *God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*" We may therefore have the great consolation of knowing that those whom we have lost, if they died in faith, *still live*. They live as Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob lived, when Christ said in the words spoken long before at the burning bush, " I am the God of Abraham,

and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," adding from His own gracious lips, "*God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*"

Trust, then, your departed ones, dying in peace, dying in penitence and humble hope. Trust them to their living Saviour; and for yourselves ask for grace so to *live* the *life* of holiness, that when you die you may be reckoned among the living, and may therefore have the Lord for your God for ever and ever. Jesus says, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life." "Because I live, ye shall live also." "I am the resurrection and the life" (saith the Lord): "he that believeth in Me, though he have died, yet shall he live:* and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die" (St. John xi. 25, 26).

* ὑποθήνη.

SECRET SINS IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S COURTESANCE.

PSALM xc. 8.

“Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance.”

PRAYER-BOOK VERSION.

“Thou hast set our misdeeds before Thee: and our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance.”

MANY of you, my brethren, have listened with awe and grief to the words of the text—words spoken on the borders of the grave.

The psalm opens with words of comfort. The Lord is set before us as our Refuge from one generation to another. He then passes on to man's frailty. *“Thou turnest man to destruction.”* *“As soon as Thou scatterest them they are even as a sleep, and fade away like the grass.”*

And this leads us to the thought of God's anger against sin. *“We consume away in Thy displeasure, and are afraid at Thy wrathful indignation.”*

This brings before us the *cause* of God's wrath. "*Thou hast set our misdeeds before Thee.*"

All sufferings, of whatever kind, sickness, pain, sorrow; loss of those dearest to us by death; loss of those who once loved us, but now have grown cold, all these troubles are the fruit of sin. "Sin entered the world, and death by sin."

But we must not look upon death, and that which follows death, merely as a consequence of sin. We must regard it as the *punishment* of sin; for so it is expressed in the words of the Psalmist: "We consume away in Thy displeasure, and are afraid at Thy wrathful indignation; for Thou hast set our misdeeds before Thee."

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. The sight of man's sin kindles His awful wrath.

Oh! my brethren, consider how awful is the cry of our grievous sins—a cry that enters "into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth" (St. James v. 4); consider how all evil deeds are mirrored in His eyes, who "cannot look upon iniquity."

If the Israelites perished in the wilderness, as a punishment for their murmurings and rebellions, surely shall we too "consume away in His wrath, and be troubled."

But this is not all. It is not only crying iniquities that are set before God; our hidden faults, our "secret sins," are beheld in the light of His countenance.

That gross and wilful sin is set before God, this

concerns the careless: but that hidden sins, deeds long forgotten and unnoticed, are not hidden from the Lord, this includes all, the religious and the careless.

Weigh the words. The hidden sins are not merely seen by God, but they are "set in the light of His countenance; our sins are brought forth, into the fullest, the brightest day, the daylight of God's face. "He is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. iv. 12, 13).

"All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do." "Hell (or the grave) is naked before Him (saith Job), and destruction hath no covering." "He knoweth the very thoughts of the heart," and reads the half-formed letters of our unuttered purposes.

Why should we dwell on this manifestation of sin before God? and what comes of it? Much, and of great import, if we deal with it aright.

Of all sins, secret sins are to be most dreaded; for if, after all, the religious man is deceived as to his own condition he is of all men most miserable. He is most miserable because he will be most bitterly disappointed. How, then, can we escape from the consequences of our secret sins?

Let secret sins be no more hidden. Drag them from their hiding-places. Already they are set

in the light of God's countenance. Let us ask Him to give us of His light; beseech Him to show us how to escape from our hidden sins. Let us beseech Him to enable us to see our secret sins as He views them; let us see them in His light.

It is not a mere play of words. When the poor woman, afflicted with an issue of blood, touched the hem of Christ's garment, Jesus knew perfectly "who touched Him," and yet He asked, "Who touched Me?" Why did He hold back His knowledge? It was to bring forth her confession; and then He spoke the gracious words, "Daughter, go in peace."

Even so God knows all our secret faults; they are not secret to Him; but He would have us know them also. Yet, although He knows, we may still lay our sins and our sorrows, again and again, before Him, that they may be purged, as Isaiah's lips were purged by the coal of fire from off the altar. Thus be they, in another sense, in the light. So it is of secret sins, as long as they are secret, they are marked for condemnation; but when known and confessed and laid before God, in the light of His countenance, then in that light may *our* sins be done away.

How, then, are we to set ourselves to discover our secret sins? First, by a careful search for our hidden sins, with earnest prayer. "Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart: prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well if

there be any way of wickedness, and lead me in the way everlasting." Take a single day, and go through your words, and your deeds, your omissions of duty, your thoughts, and then consider which of these is most habitual to you; for it is in habits that secret sins are hidden.

If you doubt of some pleasure, and if you are anxious to know whether it would be right to indulge in it, separate it from yourself; if you would condemn it in another, be still more severe with yourself. But, alas! it is commonly the other way.

Be really in earnest, and you will not be unaided; your heavenly Father will send down the Holy Ghost to comfort and sustain you; and the example of your blessed Saviour will guide you.

Go about your self-examination, as you undertake any serious matter of business.

No work is more difficult, but none is more sure of success if it be done in the true spirit. God will help you by His grace; He will guide you in His providence. Watch for the visitations of His Holy Spirit; and when they come *use them*.

Do it in the presence of God, then the result will be as it was with holy Job—"I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job xlii. 5).

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES.

ST. LUKE v. 5, 6.

“Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net. And when they had thus done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.”

THE character of Christ's miracles was not that of bare signs or wonders. For the most part they were restorative—healing the sick, giving strength to the withered hand, providing food for the hungry, raising the dead from the grave. And more than this, His mighty deeds involve important principles.

This miracle was introduced carefully. As the people pressed upon Jesus, to hear the Word of God, He entered into Simon's ship, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. Then came the sermon. He sat down, and taught the people out of the ship; and when He had left speaking, He said unto Simon, “Launch out into the deep, and let down for a draught.”

Peter pleaded, "We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing:" as if it were useless to try, yet submissively adds, "nevertheless at *Thy* word I will let down the net." Then followed the marvellous result. "When they had thus done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.

Strange it may seem that any sort of failure should beset His mighty works! Strange, but full of meaning! Is there not the same sad failure in the work of the ministry? Even work for God is too often full of disappointment.

"Preach the Word." "Be instant in season, out of season." "Reprove, rebuke, exhort," Sunday after Sunday.

Lonely hours spent in earnest prayers, on behalf of the flock—hours of anxious preparation, in weariness and weakness, from year to year, ready to "spend and be spent," and with what result? If St. Paul cried, "The more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved," how shall *we* expect that "the more we love, the less we be loved?" Alas! alas! careless hearers, cold hearts.

But there was one, greater than St. Paul, Who poured out His grief and disappointment, in the plaintive words, "Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life" (St. John v. 40).

All this is hard to flesh and blood. It is trying to the feeble faith of mortal teachers. But more, all this inconsistency gives a handle to the adversary, who gladly seizes it.

What mocking do we hear of the scanty results

of missionary efforts, or among the half-heathen at home! Are there not modern Sanballats about us, crying, "What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? . . . will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned" (Nehemiah iv. 2). Will our missionaries make Christians of cannibals? Will they ennoble the treacherous Indians? Will they civilize the degraded Negroes? Or the Bushmen, who are by some accounted as nearer to the brutes than to man, shall they also become Christians? Their converts (is their cry) are a by-word. "Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break their stone wall" (Neh. iv. 3).

Is this triumph well grounded? Certainly not. We may lay it down as a sure principle that seeming failure is no triumph to the enemy; no ground for despair to the workers for God.

The latter touches us most closely. Let us view it in this aspect, for *our* encouragement—the encouragement of us, the ministers. Let us bend our knees in earnest and hopeful prayers, and we shall then learn, that He who allowed His disciples to well nigh perish in the deep, will never forsake us: and in the darkest night "The Lord shall be to thee an everlasting light" (Isa. lx. 19).

The difficulty, or the seeming failure, was foreseen by our Lord, and foretold in many passages of Holy Writ. It was foreshone in this very miracle.

With this express signification, "the net brake,"

the miracle was marred. It was not a mere miracle of mercy, but it was a miracle of Divine teaching: "Jesus said unto Simon, 'Fear not;' from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

The net brake, *not* by chance, but to show that the gospel net would in some cases break; not only that many would refuse to enter in, but that many would break away from the law which they had accepted.

In all ages of the Church there have been many Demases, and "the love of many have waxed cold." There have been, and there will be, many backsliders in heart. Must we, therefore, the ministers of the gospel, surcease our efforts? Shall we lie down in despair, and say, "There is no hope?" "Ephraim is given to idols: let him alone." Where, then, would be our faith and patience? or where would be our wisdom?

Failure, or rather partial failure, may be called the law of progress, in our fallen condition. Human life is full of failures. Successive failures are in some cases the steps by which men climb to success. All the various arts are learnt through failures. Even in field sports the hunter learns by missing how to hit; and in the business of life how many fail, while others succeed. In the various schemes for the good of our fellow-men, in works of charity, how often the seeming kindness results in evil; either those who most need the help are overlooked, or it is given to those who do not need it.

In the discoveries of science, how much error is mixed with truth! How much evil is mingled with the good. Again and again "the net" of human effort (though guided by God's providence) "breaks," and the result (all but secured) "goes out again into the deep."

But, in their daily occupation, men do not therefore give up their endeavours. Business proceeds; science progresses. Thank God, kindness is not wholly wasted, gratitude is not unknown. "The children of this world are wise in their generation;" therefore so let it be with "the children of light." "Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, a necessity is laid upon me: yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel."

Missionaries must and will go forth. Parish priests must and will pursue their inobtrusive course. Men and women, moved by the Spirit of God, will seek the miserable, the afflicted, and restore the lost.

Oh! my dear brethren, unite your fervent prayers with them; and for yourselves, see that ye escape not from the gospel net, for then you would go away into the deep of an aimless existence. Thank God, all our endeavours will not end in failure. Alas! some break through the net; but by the grace of God many are gathered in, and brought safely within the gospel net.

There is another miracle like this, yet in one respect unlike. You may find it in St. John xxi.

6—11. It occurred after the Resurrection. The miracle recorded by St. Luke took place in the earlier period of our Lord's ministry. In the earlier miracle the net "brake;" in the latter "they drew the net to land, full of great fishes," "and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken." Of these two miracles, the first was a type upon the earth, the other was a type of the Church above.

"Lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands"—the pledge of victory, beyond all failure, one great success. "Those whom My Father hath given Me, I have kept; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand."

Oh! how glorious is that gift! Oh, how blessed for those who follow the Lamb; blessed for those who keep His commandments; blessed even for those who, though they have grievously sinned, yet, having truly repented, are graciously accepted!

"Be ye, then, dear brethren, as those who are begotten again unto a lively hope, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

THE PALSIED WILL.

ST. MATTHEW viii. 6, 7.

“ Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.”

IF leprosy be a fit type of moral impurity, palsy is not less strikingly a type of moral weakness. Accordingly we may see in the conduct of the two men set before us in the gospel, types of two spiritual conditions. The leper comes of his own accord ; feeling his misery, he kneels and prays, and is healed. The palsied man lies helpless upon his bed, while his master pleads for him ; but Jesus, ever compassionate, shows Himself ready to seek and to save those that are lost. He responds to the centurion's appeal : “ I will come and heal him.”

In this miracle, therefore, we have a type of the sinner in his helplessness. The sinner, touched with remorse, like the leper, is overwhelmed with the burden of guilt. The iron goes into his soul ; and he cries, “ I acknowledge my faults, and my

sin is ever before me" (Ps. li. 3). But little does he suspect his moral weakness. He says without hesitation, "I go, sir." He has no suspicion that he can return "as the dog to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Pet. ii. 22). And yet how often, again and again, may he fall! and even then he can hardly believe in his frailty.

It is an awful crisis in a man's life when he realizes the feebleness of his own will! "Grievously is he tormented." What torment can be greater? He sees before him the abyss of despair, and yet he cannot turn his eye from the temptation.

Oh, may God in His infinite mercy deliver us from going down into the pit of destruction!

But who of us (though not so far gone) is not ignorant of the instability of the will? Who has not had cause to lament the very deed which he had vowed he would not do?

We see it in others. We almost take it for granted that they will fail. Have we pondered over the same inconsistency in ourselves? Strange mystery (the consequent of the fall), can our present resolutions bind us for the future? If not, can we remain satisfied with such uncertainty?

Have you (my brethren) earnestly considered what will be the consequences of this frailty of purpose?—this instability of the will? Whatever dire consequences we have seen in others, will surely be realized in ourselves, unless we seek

(until we find) *a strength and firmness of purpose beyond our own.* For this very cause Christ came down from heaven to save us from our own frailty. He came, not merely to speak the word of comfort and then to leave us in abject bondage to the chain of evil habit. He came to renew our fallen nature; to give life, vigour, growth, beauty, and strength. This was His purpose, and His power was, and still is, commensurate.

As surely as He cleanses the foulness of the polluted leper, so surely He strengthens the ancle-bones, infuses vigour into the feeble muscles, and knits the whole frame of the no longer paralytic, if only he be willing to be saved.

As surely as Christ forgives the penitent, so surely He bestows the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and strengthens him to resist the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Never therefore (dear brethren) despair; but go to Him who is mighty to save. Go to Him in your weakness for power, as you go to Him in guilt to find mercy; or in pollution for purity.

Go in faith, but go in *earnest*; for the *feebleness* of will is the very death-mask of sin! Sin is a defect of the will. The upright will is according to God's will, but the perverted will rebels against that will, and runs contrary; just as the feeble will wavers and therefore errs from the right.

Go again to Christ, your only Saviour, and beseech Him to bestow upon you the greatest of all gifts—"a perfect heart."

To thy dearest friend on earth thou wouldst shun to reveal thy whole heart in all its windings. But to Him Who knows thine every thought thou mayest go. He has undergone temptation, and can therefore feel for the tempted; while He *hates* the sin, He *loves* the sinner; and while He compassionates thy misery, He removes the cause of it.

Do you dread the power of the Evil One? Christ will give you a holy courage to face your enemy boldly. “*Sin* shall not have dominion over you,” for Jesus will enable you to say, “*I will* run the way of thy commandments, when Thou has set mine heart at liberty.”

Go to Him in this spirit, and you will not be disappointed. Thousands of penitent sinners have found strength, and health, and refreshment, and why shouldst not thou?

Learn, therefore, how that holy strength of purpose is given; and so you will be the more encouraged to seek until you find. Consider how first came into your heart the wish for power to overcome sin. It did not come of itself; it did not come from your own heart; but it was God's gift through Jesus Christ. It is He, who by His Holy Spirit has put into our hearts an earnest longing for holiness. The first hatred of sin is also the gift of His grace; and this deep hatred does, for a time, drive us back with horror from the thought of sin. This awful fear of sin is God's gift, to

help us to climb the first steps of the ladder of penitence.

But after a while, unless we watch and pray, the dread of sin subsides ; the temptation is strong, the *will* wavers, and the penitent is then in great danger of falling back into the sin of which he had repented.

1. Beware, therefore, of listlessness and indifference. Fill up the vacant hours of business with deeds of kindness, or with pleasant converse with your friends, or in giving pleasure to little children in their games. Never be idle ; idleness is the devil's opportunity ; in idleness the old familiar thoughts recur, the accustomed pleasure allures, the foulness of the sin goes off, and the miserable man is again wallowing in the mire.

Keep yourself then well occupied ; fully and well. Make it a conscience that, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Eccl. ix. 10). Whatever you undertake, if innocent, persevere until your work is finished, unless you are called away for some higher duty. When weary of hard work, find some innocent amusement ; and seek the company of those who are pure and good.

2. But, above all, seek to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Saviour Jesus Christ." Draw near to God, your heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your Saviour, in prayer, and the study of God's holy word ; and, with penitent heart and

steadfast purpose, approach your Saviour in the sacrament of His death.

So, by the grace of God, the purer, higher, and nobler pleasures will be strengthened, and the allurements of the lower will be weakened.

In the union of heavenly meditations and active duty, your good principles will be fortified ; the heart and mind will be braced. Your WILL will come under the control of the highest motives, and gain strength for good.

Just as *evil* habit weakens our good will, so *good* habit strengthens it.

Devotion and diligence will confirm your good resolutions : or rather Christ will do it, for the power is of Him.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE. YES OR NO.

ST. MARK ix. 24.

“ Lord, I believe ; help Thou mine unbelief.”

BELIEF and unbelief stand side by side, but they are not of equal value ; for the one is positive, the other is negative. The one says “ Yes,” the other says “ No.” “ Yes ” acknowledges the truth of a proposition ; “ No ” denies it.

You may naturally say, “ My ‘ No ’ is as good as your ‘ Yes ’ :” but on further consideration I think you will agree with me, that “ *No* ” cannot, in the nature of things, be equal to “ *Yes*.” Ten men may say honestly and truly, according to their knowledge, that no rain fell yesterday, but the positive evidence of one man, that he saw and felt the rain, will counterbalance the negative evidence of the ten. “ *Yes* ” is a power : “ *No* ” is weak.

Faith, even in this life, has accomplished great results : *Unbelief* has never accomplished anything.

I will is a motive power.

I won't is simply obstructive.

How far more glorious is light than darkness—

light, the outpouring of one of God's breathless creatures, formed expressly for the eye of man and his fellow-denizens on earth; *darkness* the mere *absence* of light.

All error, like sin, is negative, that is, founded on "No:" for it is contradictory to truth, as sin is contradictory to goodness. Observe how many names of evil things are compounded with *no* or *not*: *impure, untrue, ungrateful, disobedient*: that is, *not true, not grateful, &c.*

Think it over, and you will find a long catalogue of vile things which are distinguished from the good by one or other of those little particles equivalent to *no*, which we affix to the names of things which we esteem, to express the notion of things which we despise. And, in fact, whatever is vile has no right to any other name than one compounded with negation; because *bad* is the absence of *good*, just as darkness is the absence of light.

If man had never fallen into sin, if he had remained pure and true and good, even though evil had been presented to him from without, I believe that we should never have uttered positive names for anything wicked or false. Such words as hatred, wrath, strife, falsehood, and the like, would never have been known. It is the sin within ourselves that has led us to think and speak otherwise.

If our language were perfect, we should see at a glance that all *evil*, whether in morals or belief,

is the contradictory of good, and consequently rests upon the baseless foundation of NO ; which is no foundation at all.

Apply, therefore, this test to the teaching of the Bible, to the records of the creation, to the fall of man, and to the restoration of the fallen, by the great doctrine of sacrifice, foreshadowed in the Old Testament, by the sacrifices of the Mosaic law, and fulfilled in the New Testament by the offering upon the Cross by Jesus.

It is not in the Bible only that the goodness of the creation, and the uprightness of man as he came from the hand of God, is recognized. It is not the Jews only, nor is it the Christian Church alone, that have looked back with yearnings that could not be suppressed, to the golden age of innocence. Among all nations on the face of the world are heard the cries of humanity for deliverance from the galling yoke of evil : and in every race the need of sacrifice is recognized, in the words of the prophet : “ *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God ? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old ? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil ? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul ?* ” (Mic. vi. 6, 7).

Listen to St. Paul : “ I find (he says) a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the

inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of the mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. vii. 21—24). But he adds, "I thank God through Jesus Christ" (Rom. vii. 25). And again: "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. viii. 1, 2).

Whence then came these yearnings of the soul for the recovery of lost innocence? Whence came the eager gaze, the lifting up of the heart to "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness?" (2 St. Peter iii. 13).

Is this the feeble cry of a weakened intellect? I answer that the noblest intellects have bowed before the cross. The most accomplished scholars, the bravest soldiers, the most learned students, the keenest men of business, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, have confessed themselves sinners in the sight of God, and have sought reconciliation with their Maker, and "made peace through the blood of the cross" (Col. i. 20).

Here, then, we have before us the great *fact* that the gospel has *prevailed*: it has been accepted by men of all conditions; they have lived by it, they have died in peace and joyful anticipation of

life eternal. This is positive evidence. Our Lord on one occasion said to His disciples, "Will ye also go away?" Peter answered, "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" (St. John vi. 68, 69).

True indeed, that same disciple shortly afterwards denied his Lord under the pressure of fear: but one glance from His merciful eye touched the heart of the apostle, and "Peter went out, and wept bitterly" (St. Luke xxii. 61, 62).

The early writers after the death of the apostles agree that Peter was crucified; and Origen records a very touching incident—that Peter, at his own request, was crucified with his head downwards, deeming himself unworthy to suffer exactly as His Lord had suffered.

From the first persecution, in which Stephen, "full of the Holy Ghost," and looking up steadfastly into heaven, "saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God," laid down his life, calling upon God, and saying, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," all through intervening ages, until now, men have been found ready to suffer for Christ's sake, even unto death: and not only strong men, but timid women; mothers with their infants beside them; and even children trained by Christian parents, have dared to die for Christ.

These are positive testimonies to the truth of

the noble principles of the Bible. Can we counter-balance them by mere negatives? . “*I believe*” is a power: it is a principle: it can be verified. “*I don't believe*” has no such power. Belief says, “*Yes,*” it can be verified. Unbelief says, “*No.*” But “*No*” is nothing; it is weak; it cannot be verified.

Let us now take a wider view of the subject.

The wonderful consistency of purpose, and the identity of principles, which may be traced in the Sacred Scriptures, afford the strongest proof, not merely of the Divine origin of the Bible, as received by a believer; but it is also a proof of the existence of a Divine (or, or least, of a superhuman) Being.

It seems impossible to account for the existence of a Book so composed, as we know the Bible to have been composed, on any other supposition than that it came from God. It is the most consistent instance of design, steadfast, long-continued, opposed to many of the currents of human opinions, purposes, and passions; and yet carried on from age to age by feeble human instruments; developed in spite of, nay by *means of*, hatred, opposition, and not unfrequently apparent defeat—a purpose requiring infinite wisdom to conceive, infinite goodness to adopt, infinite power to execute, infinite tenderness, to bear with the obstinate resistance, and thankless rejection of those for whose benefit it was devised.

To put this in the clearest light. No sooner

had our first parents fallen from their uprightness than the promise of redemption was given. The seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, but not without a sacrifice: "It shall bruise his heel." The offering of Cain, the fruit of the ground, was rejected. The offering of Abel, the "*Slain Lamb*," was accepted.

The Scripture does not merely reveal facts, but insists upon certain principles. In particular it insists upon those dispositions which are required for a reception of a revelation (as such), while it protests against those dispositions which incline men to reject such revelation.

For instance—"Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (St. Matt. xi. 25). "If any man *will do His will*, he shall know of the doctrine" (St. John vii. 17). "The *fool* hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Ps. xiv. 1). "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word" (Isa. lxvi. 2).

This union of *principles*, with the revelation of *facts*, is a peculiar note of truth. Mere myths and legends never anticipate objections, because they were never intended to command belief.

Heresiarchs and impostors seldom profess to base their theories upon historical facts: or if they do, it is a basis so palpably unsound that it is difficult to believe that they themselves are satisfied with it.

An historical foundation gives substance to

faith, and embodies principles—those very principles which are involved in the reception of a revelation.

Two chapters of the Bible sufficed to record the creation, the innocence, the happiness of man. The whole of what remains is occupied with his redemption. Fitly, therefore, in every portion of the sacred Volume is found some reference to Him through whom redemption came: not merely here and there, by the way, but perpetually and systematically the thought of the Divine Redeemer is suggested to the attentive reader, or so prominently set forth that no reader can escape it.

In type and figure; by ordinances and providences; in the words of prophecy, whether mystical or literal; by a wonderful impersonation, as in the Psalms; in historical records; in the words of admiration, love, adoration,—teaching, comforting, healing, reproof, suffering, triumphant, is He presented to our faith, Who is our only hope and trust. He is the one Object of Desire, for Whom we see in Holy Scripture the whole creation groaning (Isa. xxvi. 8; Hagg. ii. 7). He is the one Physician of the soul, to Whom in Holy Scripture we see the sick approaching. He is the One Way of Life and the One Fountain of Truth, by Whom in Scripture we see men pressing into everlasting life, and to Whom we see them coming to draw the life-giving waters of heavenly wisdom. He is the One Spouse of the Church, towards Whom we see in the closing pages of the Scriptures all

faithful hearts turning with love and reverence (St. Matt. ix. 12; St. Luke viii. 43; St. Matt. xiv. 25; St. John xiv. 6; St. Luke xvi. 16; St. John iv. 14; St. Matt. xxv. 6—10; 2 Cor. xi. 2).

We all long for happiness. We are all trying more or less earnestly to raise ourselves to a better condition; but as long as we seek our happiness in this life only, we must be disappointed. If you ask why? I answer, It is because God has prepared a better, purer, nobler life for us: a life that never ends.

God made man in His own image. Alas! he fell; therefore until we are conformed to His likeness we shall never be satisfied. "As for me," says the Psalmist, "I will behold Thy presence in righteousness: and when I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it" (Ps. xvii. 16).

But perhaps you may say, "God is far away beyond our reach; we cannot see Him, how then can we love Him?" Yes, God is beyond our *gaze*, beyond the reach of our *understanding*, but *not* beyond our faith and love if we draw near to Him in Jesus. God sent His Son into the world, that in the loving face of Jesus we may see God and live.

"Jesus stood and cried," saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water;" and

He fulfilled the promise on the day of Pentecost. He is ready to fulfil it for each of us if we are willing.

Are you willing? Will you say "Yes"? or will you say "No"?

If you say "Yes"—though you say it with doubt and fear—if you cry, "*Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief,*" He will show you that "*all things are possible to him that believeth*" (St. Mark ix. 23).

If, on the other hand, you say "No," how will you go about to establish the negation? Where can you find a word that will serve as a foundation-stone for an edifice which is destitute of substance? It is impossible.

Between these positions there is a middle term. It is the position of doubt, perplexity, and hesitation. The father of the unhappy child expressed that condition in the words, "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us."

Observe the answer of Jesus: "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."

The effect of these encouraging words did not result in immediate full conviction, but they strengthened him in his anguish, to cry with tears, "*Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief;*" and the child was restored to his right mind.

In ordinary circumstances our mortal life is happy or miserable in proportion as we do—or neglect to do—our duties faithfully. Some may be

called upon to bear severe suffering : others may enjoy good health and prosperity : but whichever of these conditions befall us, our true wisdom is to say, with the father of the afflicted child, " Lord, I believe ; help Thou mine unbelief."



SYMPATHY IN SORROW AND IN JOY.

ROMANS xii. 15.

“ Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”

THE apostle is here laying down the rules of a holy life: of which *sympathy* is one, and one which is taught by our blessed Saviour, who was “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb. iv. 15). True sympathy is two-fold—sorrow for the sorrows of others, and joy in their joys. If either be absent the sympathy is not complete.

The sympathy with joy is here put first, and rightly so; not because it is the higher duty, but because it is more easily overlooked, *as a duty*.

You may, perhaps, be inclined to say, “Surely it is easy enough to sympathize with the joy of the happy and the healthy;” but how seldom is it carried out. *Every* one acknowledges that to feel for the sorrows and troubles of their friends and neighbours is a duty; but few consider it a duty to rejoice with their friends and neighbours in their

prosperity. Yet the apostle gives the first place to this form of sympathy: "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."

Turn, then, to the Great Exemplar, the perfect pattern of tender love and perfect sympathy.

How, then, is this double aspect of Christian sympathy set forth in the gospel?

It is remarkable that our blessed Saviour wrought His first miracle at a marriage, the marriage in Cana of Galilee (the first manifestation of power). There was also a manifestation of sympathy with the natural joys of humanity. His gracious presence sanctified the marriage-feast; and at the same time, by His mighty miracle of turning water into wine, He transformed the elements of nature: the good wine kept to the last was the type of enduring and ever-increasing joy, while at the same time He provided for the pleasure of the guests.

Our blessed Lord, then, is here set before us as the minister of joy in the *first miracle*; showing Himself in sympathy with the brighter side of human life. Although He ever had before Him the bitter agony of the cross, the shame, and the awful darkness, He foresaw the time when He would be "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

One bright miracle He wrought for the happy bride and bridegroom, and their guests; and from that moment until He cried upon the cross, "*It is finished,*" He devoted Himself to the ministry of mercy, with all His trials ever before Him.

Most of His miracles were closely allied to sorrow and suffering. He did, indeed, bring relief to the sufferer and joy to the mourner; but the very act of healing brought before Him those many thousand sufferers for whom no healer was at hand.

Sometimes He ministered with tears: at other times with groans. In Him were fulfilled the words of the prophet, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." "He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows—smitten of God, and afflicted . . . and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. liii. 1—6).

Oh! what sympathy was this?—not mere compassion for the sufferer, but real suffering *with* him.

He tasted human woes in His own soul and body: "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" (Isa. liii. 5).

Yet, even here, from the dark cloud of sorrow and suffering, there shone a gleam of joy: "*He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied*" (Isa. liii. 1—6).

Oh, then, let us endeavour to imitate Him, in His tender pity for the sorrows of the poor, the sick, and the mourners. Thank God, I know that many of you are ever ready to sympathize with friends and neighbours, and to help them in their

troubles. I know nothing more touching, more Christ-like, than the readiness of the poor to help and comfort their neighbours in times of sickness or other troubles.

It is, indeed, among the labouring class, with few exceptions, the wife and not the husband who acts the good Samaritan, for his work calls him away from home from morning until evening is closing in.

There is another form of Christian love almost (if not quite) as touching as that which we have been reviewing; it is when the sad, the sorrowful, and the sorely-tried throw themselves cheerfully into the innocent pleasures of the young and happy. It is a glorious victory over self to "*re-joice with them that do rejoice*;" when themselves weeping, they would fain ask for the tears of others on their own behalf. Wherever this unselfish sympathy is seen, we see one of the most beautiful sights upon the earth; we see one who is like Christ. In these tried souls, sorrow has brought forth its rightful fruits—tenderness, and sympathy that vibrates to the touch of every human trouble.

What, then, is the reward of these tried servants of their suffering Master? It is, that in feeling for the sorrows of others, they are themselves comforted; and in sympathizing with the *happy*, *their* joy is reflected upon themselves.

Perfect sympathy is perfect love, and perfect love is perfect joy; perfect in its nature, and ever-

lasting, because it draws these loving souls to the feet of God.

Let us pray God to give us kind consideration for one another. If God gives us health and strength and good cheerful spirits, let us go to the bed-side of our sick neighbours, and try to cheer them in their loneliness, and sympathize with them in pain and weariness. If their heart is sad and sorrowful, try to lead them to their Saviour, who has not forgotten all that He endured for our redemption; "for we have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. iv. 15).

If it has pleased God to lay upon you sorrow, or sickness, or if troubles find their way into your home, or your business, do not despair, but trust that God will make for you a way of escape; He will send to you a Comforter, even the Holy Spirit of God; and if it be for your good, He will also send to you some kind friend who will weep for you in your sorrow, and rejoice with you, when the cloud of grief has faded away under the sunshine of God's gracious love.

TEMPERATE IN ALL THINGS.

1 CORINTHIANS ix. 25.

“ Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown ; but we an incorruptible.”

THE Christian converts in Corinth were surrounded by heathen unbelievers. Before their conversion by the preaching of St. Paul they were idolaters ; and had taken pleasure in the Isthmean games. These games and contests, consisted in boxing, wrestling, leaping, running, quoiting, and hurling the spear. The competitors were subject to a long and severe course of training, without which they could not possibly win the prize.

It was, therefore, very natural that St. Paul should compare the Christian warfare against sin, with the hardships and self-denials of the Grecian athletes. For each of the winners the prize held forth a *crown*. In the case of the heathen it was a corruptible crown ; but in the case of the Christian it is the crown incorruptible. The one

prize was a fading laurel wreath ; the other is a crown of glory, imperishable ; a crown of rejoicing, a crown of righteousness, a crown of life eternal, for those who are faithful unto death.

But the apostle does not merely compare the Christian athlete with the heathen : he draws out a *principle*. That principle is, that whether we seek for a fading crown, or a crown immortal ; if we would gain the prize, *we must*, in striving for the mastery, *be temperate in all things*.

In the Olympic games each man ran for himself : but one only could be crowned. In the Christian race, *heaven* is the goal ; and the success of one is no hindrance to the others. Blessed be God, the feeblest Christian, who is true-hearted and perseveres to the end, “ shall receive a crown of glory, that fadeth not away ” (1 Pet. v. 4).

Therefore the humblest, feeblest Christian, if he is sincere in his endeavours, will win the prize.

Not saints and martyrs only, but little children and trembling penitents can say, by the grace of God, “ I therefore run, not as uncertainly ; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air,” that is, “ My efforts are not spent in vain.”

Whether we are helpless, and feeble, and dependent as little children ; or whether we are strong men toiling in worldly business ; or whether we are laid prostrate by severe illness ; or whether we are steeped in poverty—*whatever* our condition in the world may be, we can obtain a crown, eternal in the heavens, that fadeth not away.

For the poorest and meanest servant of God,
Christ died.

For the king upon his throne; for the men of science; for those who are guides and teachers of their fellows; for simple workmen, and even for little children, there is but one way to obtain the incorruptible crown; and that way is to be "*temperate in all things.*"

"Temperance in all things" is St. Paul's motto; and St. Peter gives the same advice. "*Be sober,*" he said, "*be vigilant*" (1 Pet. v. 8); and again St. Paul writes, "Let your moderation be known unto all men" (Phil. iv. 5). David also says, "I refrain my soul, and keep it low, like as a child that is weaned from his mother: yea, my soul is even as a weaned child" (Ps. cxxxix. 3).

All these passages express a great principle—*moderation, temperance, sobriety*: not only in meat and drink, but in all earthly pleasures.

Nothing more certainly hardens a man's heart than excess in bodily pleasures—eating, drinking, and sloth: and those who are in good health and good spirits, and have sufficiency in worldly wealth, need the voice of the apostle more than those who are poorly provided. Remember how "the rich man fared sumptuously every day: but in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments," while the poor beggar, Lazarus, "was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom."

Observe that St. Paul bids the Christian to be temperate in *all things*. Not only in *success* and

prosperity ; but even in the *love of earthly relations and friends*. See how he exclaims, "What! mean ye to weep and break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts xxi. 13). "I would that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 Thess. iv. 13).

We have but a frail hold upon the nearest and dearest of earthly friends and relations: the loving wife may be cut off in a moment, when God calls her to a better home, leaving her little ones, and her widowed husband to do a double duty.

Or, again, the head of the house may be taken away, leaving the widow and the children to struggle through the world, without the support and guidance of an earthly father.

Even in the enjoyments of religion we must exercise temperance. In the fervour of religious feeling there is danger of excess. The *pleasures* of religion are not to take the place of *duty*. The popular preacher becomes an idol to the excited hearer. The best and purest joys, if too much indulged and sought after as an end, become a snare; for then there is a serious danger of shunning irksome duties. Wisely, therefore, does the apostle lay before us the absolute duty of *temperance* (or *moderation*) in all things. Temperate in the enjoyment even of spiritual, as well as in earthly joys.

This lesson of sobriety, and temperance, and moderation, is hardest for the young, the healthy

and the eager-minded, whose temptation is to expend their energies in the pleasures which come before them, whether they be sensual, or the love of friends and relations ; and even in the enjoyment of the *pleasures* of religion there is danger.

Pray, therefore, my dear young friends, that God may help you to be *calm, steadfast, patient, earnest*, looking forward to the end.

When earthly pleasures spread their bright colours before you ; when sweet songs ring in your ears, and dreams of love picture for you a joyous life for many years, *kneel down in the presence of God. Behold Jesus on the Cross* pouring out His precious blood for you ; and beseech Him to put into your heart such love towards Him, that you will shrink back with dread from forsaking His holy service. When temptation comes upon you, remember that you are sworn soldiers of the cross.

What, then, have you to do with the pomps and vanities of the world, and the lusts of the flesh ? “Your treasure is in heaven,” for Jesus has ascended into the Holy of Holies to prepare a place for you ; “there let your heart be also.”

Your crown is (by the grace of God) a bright immortal diadem that never fades. But remember that He who now holds up that crown before you, once hung upon the cross.

The cross is the measure of the world. The shadow of the cross dims the sunshine of all mere earthly brightness, and tones down all earthly joys to the soberness of truth. The cross of Christ

demands thy soul, thine heart, thy strength. Wilt thou not then give thy *all* to Him who died for thee?

Dear brethren, I will not cast away hope for you, for Christ loves you, and He it is who bids me to plead with you. Listen to His loving call—His voice so full of love! I know not why any one of you should be cast away. HE Himself it is who *speaks* to you by the mouth of His minister: Hear therefore His loving call: He will give you grace and power to strive for mastery over temptation; and when that victory is won, He will assuredly bestow upon you not a corruptible crown, but an incorruptible.

