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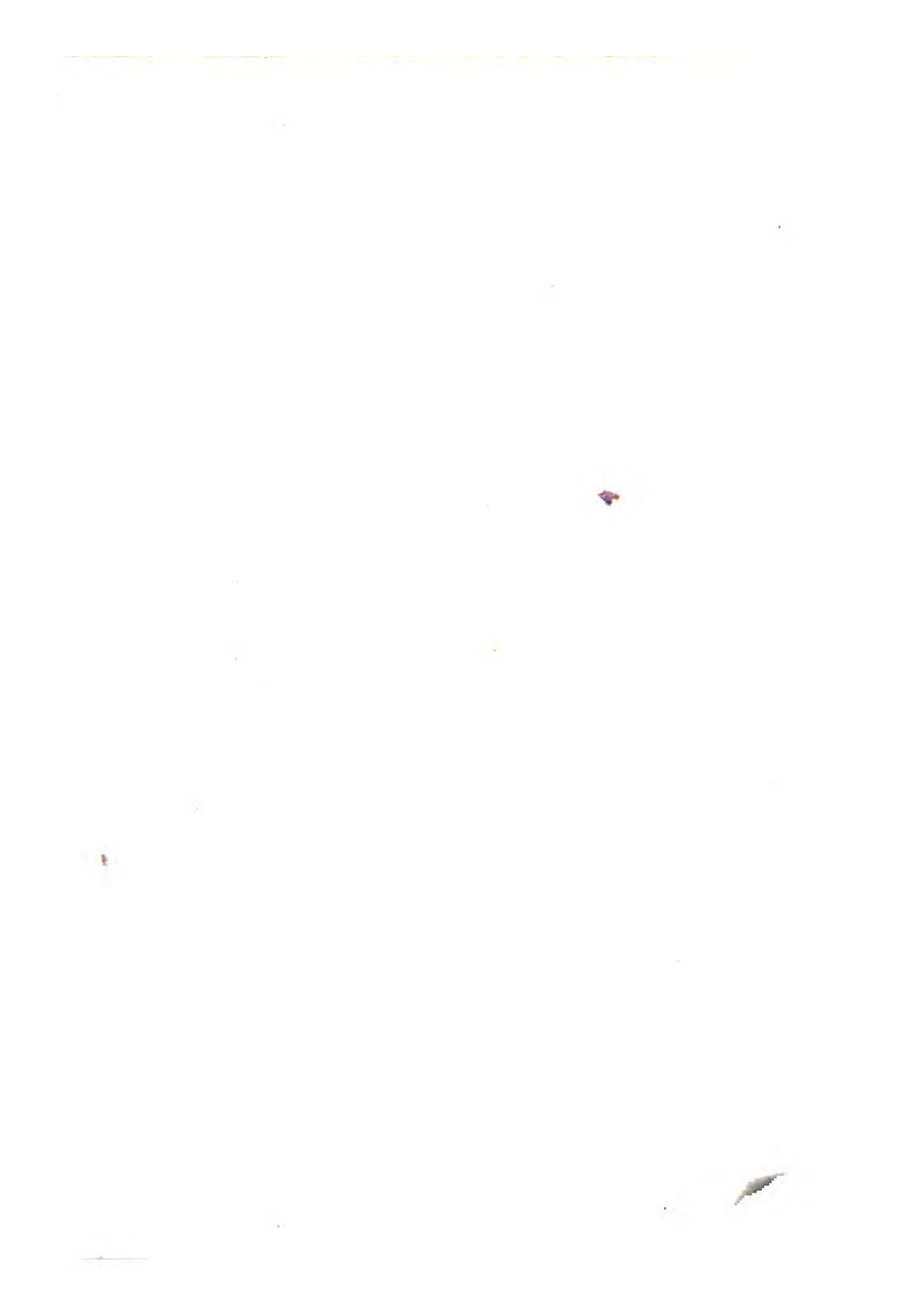
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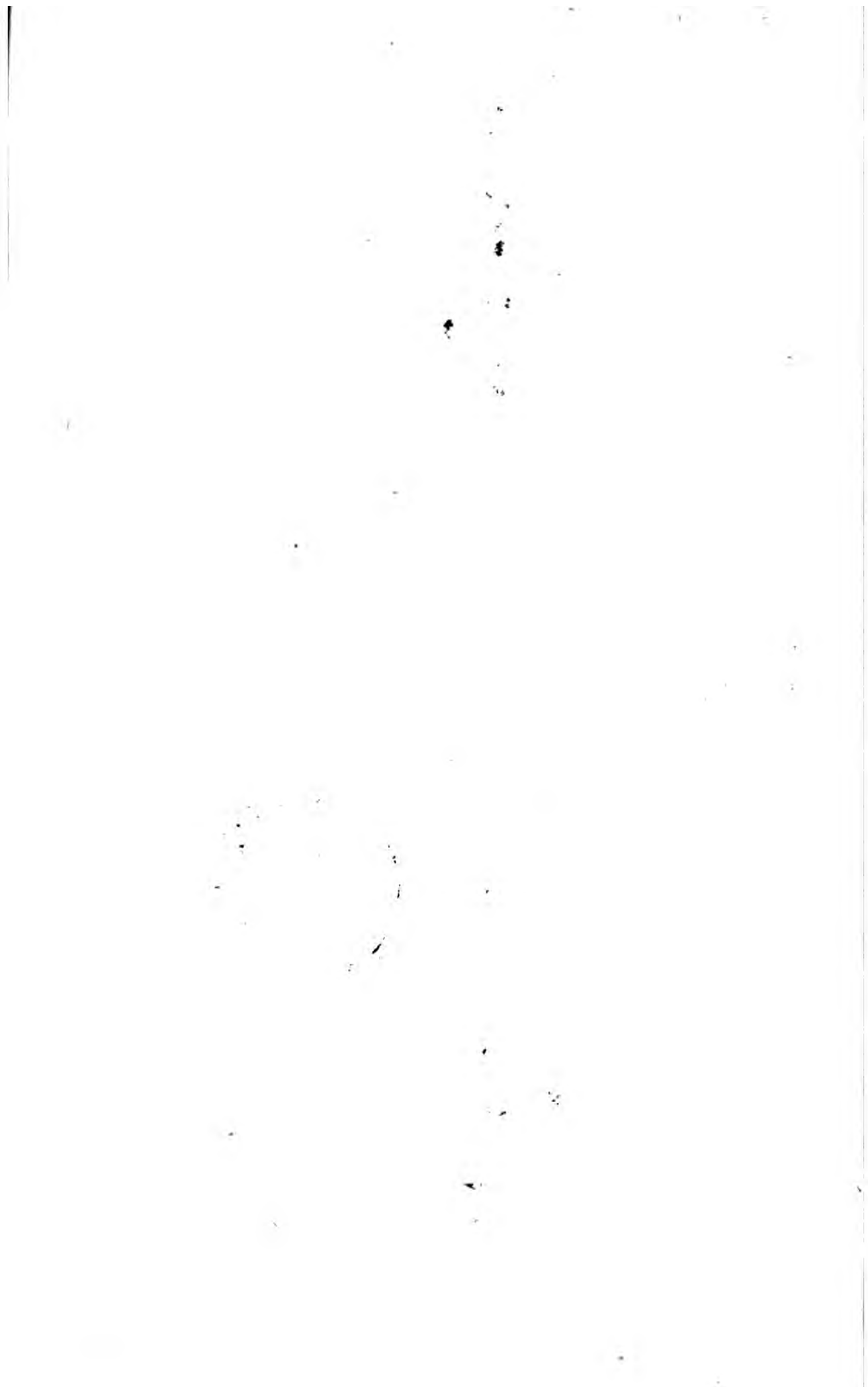


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Seven sermons

Robert Martin





SEVEN SERMONS

BY

THE LATE

REV. ROBERT MARTIN, M.A.

(OF ANSTEY PASTURES, NEAR LEICESTER.)

"Sure and Steadfast"



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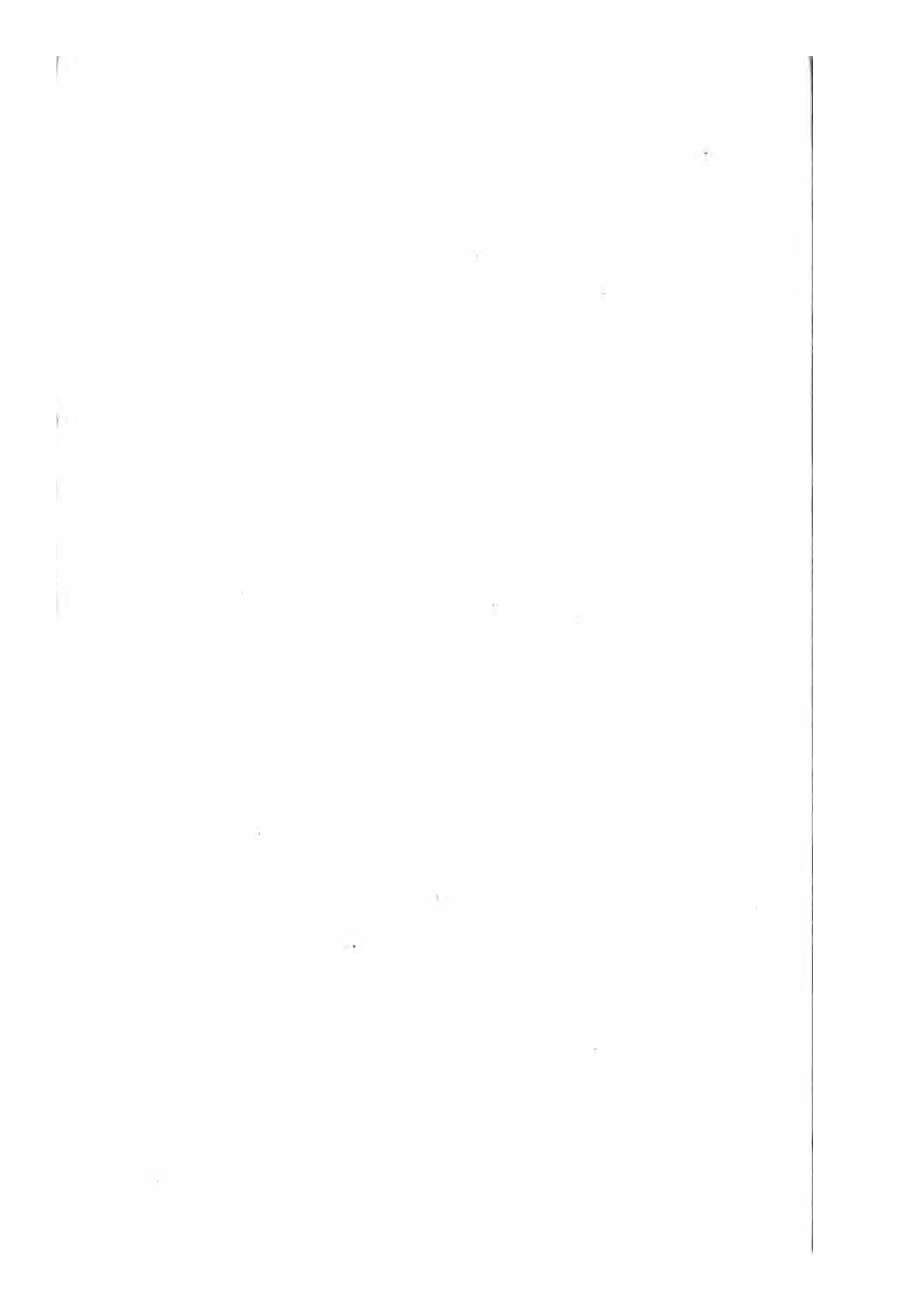
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PREFACE.

THE following Sermons are offered to the public, in the hope that to those who have known the Author, they may present some lasting memorial of one so recently gone home from among us. To those to whom the name of the Author even is unknown, the publication of simple Gospel truth, in a form such as this, will, it is hoped, need no apology.

If by this means one ray of light is brought to any man, or one spark of comfort is kindled in the blackness of the wilderness of work, which this world (without Christ) must for ever seem to be, the object of the Editors will be fully satisfied.

Anstey Pastures,
November, 1871.



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SERMON I.

PSALM CXXX. 5, 6.

“I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.

“My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.”

THOSE who “wait for the Lord,” are compared to soldiers in a garrison, or watchmen who, according to the words of the prophet,* stand continually upon the watch-tower in the day-time, and are set in their ward whole nights. In their night-watch they are represented as looking with great anxiety for the first streaks of daybreak, for the first appearances of sunrise, which is to relieve them from their tedious

* Isaiah xxi. 8.

state of disquietude and suspense. Long have they waited ; and whilst on all sides there are “ scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation,”* their souls have waited still for the Lord. “ In his word” (has been their language), “ in his word do I hope.” And if the enquiry is ever made of them—as of old “ out of Seir—Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?” the answer hitherto has been, “ The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye.”† A glorious morning shall break upon those who “ look and long for his appearing:” and dark night shall fall on those who shut their eyes, and close their ears, against the warnings of Scripture, and the signs of the times. “ When they shall say, ‘ peace and safety;’ then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.”‡ “ If ye will enquire, enquire ye; return, come.”

The Psalm before us consists of two parts, a complaint as of one in deep distress ; and an

* 2 Peter iii. 3, 4. + Isaiah xxi. 11, 12. † 1 Thess. v. 3.

answer from above promising relief and deliverance in the end. The party complaining is Israel, as we learn from the reply at the 7th verse. This is the answer to your complaints, "Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." There may be but little mercy for God's chosen people in the world; the world's eye is evil towards them because He is good; but "with the LORD there is mercy," "and He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."*

This is the answer to the party complaining,—an answer (as you observe) promising final and complete deliverance. It is in deep distress that the complaint is made. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD: Lord, hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication: If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"† It is not attempted to justify those who make this appeal; they plead guilty,—they confess their sinfulness,—but they pray God to hide his face from their sins and not to remember their iniquities. "If thou, LORD

* Psalm cxxx. 7, 8. † Psalm cxxx. 1-3.

shouldest mark iniquities,”—if thou shouldest observe and treat them deservedly,—“O Lord, who shall stand? but there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.” “Forgiveness” first,—then “the fear of the Lord.” This is just reversing the common religion of mankind. “We must fear the Lord” (say they) “and then he will forgive us.” Now the Psalmist does not put the matter in that way. “There is forgiveness with thee, O Lord,”—beginning with thee, arising from thyself, from thy free grace and mercy,—“forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.” No fear on our part,—no fear of thy name, no love to thee, till we are assured of thy forgiveness. No true obedience,—but in the sense of sins forgiven. “The gift of God is eternal life,—the *gift* of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* “We love him” (if we have any love at all to God), “because he first loved us,”† and shed abroad “his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins,”‡—shed abroad this love of His in our hearts by the Holy Ghost§,—kindling our love to Him in return; our love

* Rom. vi. 23. † 1 John iv. 19. ‡ Eph. ii. 4, 5.

§ Rom. v. 5.

to Him and to His ways, to His word and to His people. And this being the case,—being assured of forgiveness, not for my sake, but for the sake of Him who has been found “a ransom and a righteousness” in the sight of God,—the believer can say in the words of the text “I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope.”

I said that these words refer in their primary meaning to Israel after the flesh, to God’s ancient people, whom he chose from among the nations of the earth to glorify his great name. They “wait for the Lord;” they watch for the time when their Messiah shall come to deliver them from the hand of their enemies, and to restore them to their own country. This is the day—which has lasted long—of their humiliation and suffering. “His blood be on us, and on our children”* was the fearful imprecation of the Jews, when they crucified their King: and bitter indeed has been their punishment, would that I could add also their repentance. It has however been only here and there one among them—during the course of ages, who has been brought to recognize their King in

* Matt. xxvii. 25.

Jesus of Nazareth, who has been taught like David "to wait for the LORD, and to hope in his word." There have been from time to time, those among them who have looked for the fulfilment of the "promises made to their Fathers," who have "cried out of the depths unto the Lord," who have "waited for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning," who have taken up the Prophet's words, and said "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth."* Perhaps as the time of their deliverance draws nigh, the number may be increased, for the Prophet goes on in the name of the Lord in the same chapter, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." "Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones;

* Isaiah lxii. 1.

lift up a standard for the people. Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed to the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, a city not forsaken.”*

This account tallies with the promise at the end of the Psalm before us, “Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption: and he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” But you are aware that the times in which we live are called the “times of the Gentiles:” God is now taking from “amongst the Gentiles a people to glorify his name.” “Blindness in part” (says St. Paul),—a partial blindness “is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in: and so all Israel shall be saved;”—Israel as a nation—“as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.”†

* Isaiah lxii. 6, 7, 10-12.

† Rom. xi. 25-27.

Now, what is true *nationally* of the Jews in the Psalms, and other parts of the Scripture, is very often true in a *spiritual sense* with regard to God's chosen people among the Gentiles.

Let us see then what spiritual food we can find for ourselves, as Christian believers, in the words of the text.

“I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.”

“In his *word*”—the Lord's word—“In his word do I hope.”

The first thing for our consideration is the Christian believer's walk and conversation, his manner of life, and the feelings and motives by which he is influenced. “I wait for the Lord.” The very expression implies that the believer is in difficulty, that he is not at ease, that he has not found his rest here, that there is something in prospect for which he waits that is far more desirable than anything he now possesses, or hopes to possess in this world. And what believer is there that does not feel difficulty—if not danger—at almost every step he takes. First as to temporal circumstances. There are times and seasons when he is enveloped in thick darkness, when no clear light breaks in upon his

path: one believer may be in difficulty as to how he is to obtain his daily bread: another as to how he is to transact such or such a business, the difficulties of which seem insuperable, and press on him on every side: a third may be in sickness and sorrow, so that the hands hang down, and the knees are feeble: we cannot sum up a quarter of the difficulties and dangers, that surround the children of God in their journey through this world. Now what are they to do in such circumstances? He who speaks in the text says, (and he had had more and harder experience than most,) the Psalmist says for his part "I wait for the Lord." What believer, who that knows anything of himself,—of his natural weakness, helplessness, proneness to evil, tendency to decay,—who that is conscious of these things, dares trust to himself, to his own will or reason for guidance? Who would not rather in his difficulties and dilemmas—of whatever kind,—do as Hezekiah did in his trouble, "go up and spread it before the Lord?"* What man, I say, that is a believer dares take any other course? He must have a better guide than himself,—one that can see farther

* 2 Kings xix. 14.

before him,—one who (if it be possible) knows “the end from the beginning.”* Unless he can get “the Lord” to guide and direct him, he will get into such affliction, that he will never forget the smartings of it. “He waits, therefore, for the Lord,” for his guidance and direction: he waits for Him to show a light in the darkness, to guide his feet into the way of peace and safety. He alone can do it: and many a believer can testify to the praise and glory of God, that when he has been in great difficulties, the rough places have been made plain, and the crooked things made straight.

And he not only has *temporal* difficulties—the Christian believer—to contend with: but he has also difficulties of a *spiritual* kind. At times he is left without a realization of his standing in Christ, without a sense of his interest in Christ’s great salvation, and of Christ’s interest in him. And this (it may be, and sometimes is) from known causes. From neglecting the means of grace perhaps,—prayer public and private, or the hearing and reading God’s word, or neglecting the Sacrament which he has ordained for the strengthening and

* Isaiah xlvi. 10.

refreshing of our souls: or it may be through the commission of something his conscience tells him to be wrong. He may have succeeded in it, but it may have brought "leanness withal into his soul." The believer is not surprised at being in trouble, when it is from known causes: when he can trace up the trouble to its source or spring. But oftentimes spiritual difficulties arise without known cause, troubles come which he is at a loss to account for: when he is in spiritual life and vigour, in intercourse and communion with God, in joy and peace of mind, when "his mountain stands so strong*" that it seems as if it cannot be moved—all at once it is gone, he is in darkness and in the depths again: torpor succeeds to vigour: spiritual death to life and peace. Now, there is no doubt good reason for this, though we may not be able to see it. We can see the "why and the wherefore" when we have neglected our privileges, or when we have done some known wrong, something (whether of omission or commission) for which our consciences accuse us. But how are we to account for these unexpected straits and diffi-

* Psalm xxx. 7.

culties, when the believer was at the height of spiritual peace and enjoyment? One thing we can see. That he is thus brought to see and to feel his dependence on his Covenant God. If that Covenant God overturns his mountain as in a moment, it brings him to feel his entire dependence, that whatever good there is in him is “not in his flesh,”—not in him as naturally constituted,—but wrought in him by the presence and constant energy of the Holy Spirit.

Well then, if a believer is in these straits, what is to be done? “To wait for the Lord.” If he has been brought to see the evil he has done,—to wait confessingly,—to wait prayerfully,—to wait believingly,—let him never hide his shame from his heavenly Father, it will only burn the deeper into his soul; but let him tell it out, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.”* Let him come believingly to the throne of grace, not that God *may be* his Father, but come to Him *as his Father* in Christ Jesus, praying that he will restore unto him—not salvation, (that

* Luke xv. 18, 19.

is not dependent upon us, but on Christ alone)—but the “joy of his salvation.” The Psalmist gives us a fine example of “waiting for the Lord” under difficulties of this kind, in the 51st Psalm, “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, O Lord, and cleanse me from my sin: for I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me: against thee—thee only—have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.” And after this confession he prays, “O make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Create in me a clean heart, O God, renew a right spirit within me.” See how he felt his dependence upon God for good—“Cast me not away from thy presence: take not thy holy spirit from me: restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,” joy lost for the time, “and uphold me by thy free spirit:” “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”* This is “waiting on the Lord” under a sense of sin. O that the same

* Psalms li. 2-4, 8, 10-12, 17.

spirit of prayer and supplication, the same feeling of helplessness and unworthiness,—yet of trust and confidence in God,—might never be absent from us under similar circumstances!

And then, again, what an example does the prophet Isaiah give us when under unlooked for difficulties and afflictions? “Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light?”—this is a very possible case, as we have shewn, although we are altogether unable to account for it;—well, what is to be done by such an one in such trouble and darkness? “let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.”* Let him “wait for the Lord” under both temporal and spiritual difficulties, wait for his guidance and direction, wait upon him confessingly, prayerfully, believingly, and he shall be brought into the light of day again, the joy of God’s salvation shall be restored to him: he shall have both “joy and peace in believing.”† And not only let the believer “wait for the Lord,” *i.e.*, for his guidance and direction amid all difficulties,

* Isaiah l. 10. † Rom. xv. 13.

temporal and spiritual ; but let him “ wait for the Lord ” in another and a higher sense, in the sense in which I believe the Psalmist, and Prophets, and Apostles meant us to wait for him—*i.e.*, “ Watch for the time when he shall come to deliver us out of this mortal life, and fully set our minds on him, love him, look, and long for him.”

The believer expects his Lord to come, that is the “ great hope set before him ” in the Scriptures, and when acting faith, he is continually “ waiting for the Lord.” Do you doubt that believers have been directed to this blessed hope, from the very beginning of this dispensation ? Look to the first chapter of the first epistle to the Thessalonians. The Apostle says that they (the Thessalonians) were “ examples to all that believed in Macedonia and Achaia,” “ knowing your election of God,” (he writes to them); “ for our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance,” “ and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God ;” (and now mark this—they were examples in this also,) “ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised

from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”* You see, these Thessalonian converts (according to the Apostle), were “examples to all that believe,” not only in their “works of faith, and labours of love, and patience of hope,”† but because they had been taught and accustomed in their believing moments, “to wait for the Son from heaven—even Jesus:” “to look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven,” (as St. Paul says in another epistle) “who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”‡ Once more let us see how St. Paul instructs Titus—“his own Son after the common faith,” “in hope” (as he says) “of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began,”§ showing the eternity of his love to his people in Christ Jesus. In the second chapter, he writes, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we

* 1 Thess. i. 4,5,7,9,10. † 1 Thess. i. 3.

‡ Phil. iii. 20, 21. § Tit. i. 2, 4.

should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." What more does the grace of God teach us? The apostle goes on in continuation, "looking for"—you see "waiting" is here turned into "looking"—"looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

"These things" (the Apostle bids Titus) "speak and exhort."* The direction is express. In one case, the Thessalonian converts are commended as "examples to all that believe," not only because they themselves "received the word with joy," and from them "sounded out" the Gospel of the Lord in distant lands, but also because they were accustomed in "their faith to God-ward" "to wait for his Son from heaven." In the other case—that of Titus—"the grace of God teaches us," and the Apostle is exhorted to teach us, to "look for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." So that when a Christian believer (in using the words of the text) says "I wait for the Lord," he means in the first place "I wait for the

* Tit. ii. 11-13, 15.

Lord” to guide and sustain me, in ordinary difficulties and in extraordinary, in temporal difficulties and in spiritual difficulties. I expect the Lord to keep me going on after he has brought me to know him. But this is not all, “I wait for the Lord” at his second advent: and a “blessed hope” and sweet waiting it is for the believer: for while other “men’s hearts are failing them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming on the earth”*—while there remaineth for them “a certain fearful looking for of judgment”†—it is with sweet peace and an assured hope that the believer waits. For the first thing that Christ will do, when he comes “to judge the world in righteousness,” will be to clear the characters of his people, to be their vindicator, to “avenge his own elect,” to own them before men and angels, and to take them to dwell with him for ever. It is in this sense that I understand the words “We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge”—not to judge the *justified* as he will judge the *wicked* “before the great white throne” according to their works.‡ They have been already judged and condemned and “crucified with

* Luke xxi. 26. † Heb. x. 27. ‡ Cf. Rev. xx. 6, 11-15.

Christ:” when Christ comes the second time without sin, it is (as regards his people) “unto salvation”—salvation “ready to be revealed in the last time.”*

The believer therefore “waits for the Lord” to clear his character,—to set to rights all “the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him,”—to be his vindicator. “It is a small thing” (he says with the Apostle) “to be judged of man’s judgment” whether he speaks well or ill of me (so far as my religion is concerned I care not), “he that judgeth me is the Lord.”† The judgment-seat of Christ is what I have to look to, and not the judgment of men. “The whole world lieth in wickedness”‡—we do not marvel therefore if the world hateth us, or rather hateth Christ in us, which is our hope of glory.

But when “he that shall come will come,”§ he will show “whose we are, and whom we serve:” he will clear the characters of his people: he will set all things to rights: he will avenge the quarrel of his elect, and will make his and their foes his footstool.

* 1 Peter, i. 5. + 1 Cor., iv. 3, 4. † 1 John, v. 19.

§ Heb. x. 37.

Again. The believer waits, that he may “enter into the joy of his Lord”—*i.e.* that he may enter fully into his joy, that he may joy and rejoice at his appearing. It may be said that at the hour of death, the Lord’s people enter into joy: and in one sense they do. “To be absent from the body is, for them, to be present with the Lord.”* It is better for them (in God’s good time) “to depart and to be with Christ:” but till the morning of the resurrection (as I think) they are still “waiting for the Lord,” in a state of happy expectation, “looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.”† You remember in the sixth chapter of Revelations, at the opening of the fifth seal “the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held,” are represented as crying with a loud voice “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” “and it was said unto them that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also, and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.”‡ They wait still to be glorified.

* 2 Cor., v. 8. † 2 Peter, iii. 12. ‡ Rev. vi. 9-11.

“When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then,”—and not till then, “shall we appear with him in glory.”* “He shall change our vile bodies, and fashion them like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.”†

That prayer of our blessed Lord’s yet remains to be fulfilled, “And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one: 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.”‡ At Christ’s second coming—for which we now wait, will his people behold and partake of his glory, they will “live and reign with Christ.” O, if we walk as believers, according to our high calling, how cheerful and how blessed is the “joy set before us!”

The second thing for our consideration is the *ground* of a believer’s comfort,—“and in his word do I hope,”—in the Lord’s word, in what he has put down in his book. If you turn to the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the nineteenth verse, you will find it

* Col. iii. 4. † Phil. iii. 21. ‡ John xvii. 22, 24.

written : “ *Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast*”—“ that by two immutable things” (we read in the preceding verse), that is by the promise and oath of God, one being as unchangeable as the other : his word being as binding as his oath : but “ God was willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel,” and so “ he confirmed it by an oath.”* Well might the Psalmist say, then, “ and in his word do I hope.” It is an “ anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast.” Just as a vessel midst the storms and tossings of the sea, while her anchor holds sure, rides through the cloudy and dark day in safety, so the believer, having by faith cast anchor within the veil, having “ sure and stedfast” hold of his Covenant God, is preserved harmless and hurtless amid the changing scenes of life. Strictly speaking, there is nothing in existence “ sure and stedfast,” but God only ; and it is only what is founded on God, or derived from him, that can lay claim to that character. The word that proceedeth out of his mouth, is “ an anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast,” because it

* Heb. vi. 17.

proceedeth from the Only True God, “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”* But all creation—every thing that is created—is in itself variable, fallible, and corruptible. Whether animate or inanimate, it is dependent on its Creator for bringing it into existence, and for the future continuation of that existence. God alone has “life in himself”—an independent existence. “In him we live and move and have our being.”† He alone “hath immortality”—is self-existent. Now here is One, who has indeed power to help us—Almighty power. And then see what security the believer has in his covenant transactions—in ‘the promises of God, which are yea, and Amen in Christ Jesus.’‡ See what security there is in the “two immutable things,”—in the word, and in the oath of God! O may we be enabled to commit the keeping of our souls to Him, as unto a faithful Creator!

“In his word do I hope,” says the Psalmist in the text. The first ground for confidence in God’s word is (as I said) derived from the character of God, on account of His unchangeableness. This is the great difference between the

* James i. 17. † Acts xvii. 28. ‡ 2 Cor. 1. 20.

Creator and the work of his hands. How changeable are we, and all things with which we are connected; how prone to decay, how unstable, how fleeting! But God reveals Himself to us as unchangeable. This is His distinguishing mark or character—as it is said in Malachi iii. 6, “I am the LORD, I change not.” Now if the word of the Lord be the word of One that “changeth not,” we may hope in it—we may have confidence in it. This was the Psalmist’s feeling, when he exclaimed “Thy word is true from the beginning, and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever”*—is immutable, unchangeable. The word of the Lord is not for *to-day* only, but is “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.”† O what good ground for the Church to hope in the Lord! “All the promises of God” (says St. Paul) “in him are yea, and in him Amen.”‡ Well may the believer say then “I wait for the Lord,”—considering the unchangeableness of Him whose word it is, “My soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.” He has good reason for waiting; he has good reason for hoping. For what does the word say of those that trust in

* Psalm cxix. 160. † Heb. xiii. 8. ‡ 2 Cor. i. 20.

Him. “He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee:”*—there is a blessed promise—“being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”† “I know whom I have believed” (said the Apostle), “and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.”‡ Aye, and if “we commit the keeping of our souls to Him in well-doing,”§ he will so keep them unto the end. “Kept by the power of God” (is the word) “through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.”|| And then as to guidance and direction—“The meek will he guide in judgment” (says the Psalmist), “and the meek will he teach his way.”¶ By the meek is meant those who are kept meek by the Spirit of God, those who are not above being guided, those who are not above being taught. Of such it is said again in Psalm xxxii. 8, “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.” And then again as to help and strength: “God

* Heb. xiii. 5. † Phil. i. 6. ‡ 2 Tim. i. 12.
 § 1 Peter, iv. 19. || 1 Peter, i. 5. ¶ Psalm xxv. 9

is faithful" (says the Apostle), "who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* Now if God be faithful, as he delights to reveal himself, faithful and true—true to his word, faithful to his promises; faithful to his Son, with whom on our part he entered into Covenant, faithful to those who have ventured their souls upon him,—what shall hinder us from taking up the Psalmist's saying, and appropriating it to ourselves: "In his word do I hope"—hope and trust. I need not say that the word of the Lord must be known, before we can hope in it. To hope in the word, and not to know it, were folly. How important, how necessary then, for one and all, to "search the Scriptures."† "My son, if thou wilt receive my words" (says the wisdom of God), "so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures;"—it is thus we should search the Scriptures, search as for hid treasures—"then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the

* 1 Cor. x. 13. + John v. 39.

knowledge of God.”* And O, think what it is to find the knowledge of God! “This is life eternal; to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent”†—these are our Lord’s own words. To understand and to know God, as he has revealed himself in his word and by his Spirit, is eternal life. Eternal life shall never be gained in any other way: good works cannot gain it: zeal and devotion cannot gain it: all that we do is mixed with sin. We must therefore (as the Apostle did) “count all things but loss”—what before we thought great gain—“for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, that we may win Christ, and be found in him.”‡ “Eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”§

My brethren, let me ask you in conclusion, have you ever known—or do you now know—what it is to be in darkness, with respect either to temporal or spiritual matters,—“to walk in darkness and have no light?” it is a very possible thing for a child of God, perhaps a very common thing. Well, how do you go on

* Prov. ii. 1, 2, 4, 5.

+ John xvii. 3.

‡ Phil. iii. 8, 9.

§ Rom. vi. 23.

then? Do you go to the *creature* for comfort? You will not find it there; you will only make bad, worse. O if you do not know what it is "to wait for the Lord," may God of his mercy teach you: for that only will bring you comfort, in trouble and perplexity; that only will make rough places plain, and crooked things straight. "Wait for the Lord" as to guidance and direction; look to him in faith and in the prayer of faith, to guide and direct your steps. And "wait for the Lord from heaven,"—for the Lord to clear up the mystery of God, to vindicate his cause and the characters of his people, to set all things right, to "take unto himself his great power and reign," and to make his foes his footstool.

"Wait for the Lord," while other men's hearts are failing them for fear; ye that are believers, look forward to His coming,—look and long for his appearing,—with pleasure and with an assured hope, "Hope in the Lord," and in his word of promise. For will he not come again to take you where he is?—to enter into his joy, to share his glory? O these are blessed things for your minds to meditate upon, to raise your affections to things above! May

God help and sustain you—keep you in peace,
and in sweet dependence upon Him! and thus
may you “wait for the Lord, more than they that
watch for the morning.”

SERMON II.

PROVERBS xiv. 9.

“Fools make a mock at sin : but among the righteous there is favour.”

THE text is divided into two sentences, each bearing a different meaning, speaking a truth as regards the state and conduct of widely-differing and distinct characters.

The first sentence or clause is a striking and surely a very awful one, if truly considered—“Fools make a mock at sin.” Sin, I need scarcely tell you, is the transgression of God’s law, the acting contrary to his mind and will : it is so defined by the apostle John—“Whoso-

ever committeth sin, transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law,"*—so that, whenever we break the law, or whenever we come short of what it requires of us, we commit sin. But then it is a most serious consideration, that this law extends to the inmost thoughts and desires of our hearts: it has respect to every imagination that is passing there: an angry thought is murder, a lustful thought adultery in the heart. The law of God, which is the pure and holy transcript of His divine mind, has not only respect to our outward words, and outward actions, but to every secret desire and passion of our hearts: so that whenever we, in thought as well as deed, come short of that which the law requires, or commit that which the law forbids, we sin against God whose law it is.

Now it is said in the text, that "fools make a mock at sin;" what are we to understand by this? There are so many ways, in which it is done, that we can but mention some of the most common and general of them. And first, they "mock at sin," who act or speak or think lightly and indifferently about it: there is of course no

* 1 John iii. 4.

doubt of those being included in the number who easily and readily commit it, those who are represented in Scripture as “drinking it like water,”* and not only readily committing it, but committing it with delight; there can be no question with regard to such “making a mock at sin:” but the description includes those also, who, having committed iniquity are tempted to cover and conceal it—to make nothing of it,—“who having eaten” (as it is said in this Book of Proverbs) “wipe their mouth, and say, we have done no wickedness.”† And again, we say, they make a mock at sin, who are unconcerned about the forgiveness of it, who feel and know nothing of “its exceeding sinfulness:” and so again, do they who imagine they can make amends for it, and settle and balance their own account with Heaven: for how light a matter must all such think it? And so once more, they “make a mock at sin”—who encourage others to sin, who “not only do these things” (as St. Paul speaks in his Epistle to the Romans) “but have pleasure in them that do them.”‡

Now it is said that all these—all who make

* Job xv. 16. † Proverbs xxx. 20. ‡ Rom. i. 32.

a mock at sin—are fools, or in other words, that none but a fool can or would “make a mock at sin : ” and surely it must appear folly in the greatest degree, to treat sin with thoughtless indifference, if we consider for a moment the dreadful consequences of sin,—what sin has done. For instance, to mention two or three particulars, it has reduced the favourite child of God, (for such Adam was, when created in the image of his Maker,) and reduced the whole race of man—the children of God—to be children of the Devil, and therefore children of wrath: it has effaced the image of the Creator, and stamped them with the likeness of the enemy of God and man. And then consider, it has brought into our world all those miseries, and pains, and sicknesses, with which we are all so well acquainted. And not only in this world are the sad effects of sin to be traced: it has kindled the flames of the bottomless pit; and not only that, but plunged numbers into that awful state, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, and out of which there is no escape, and no deliverance. And we may go further—another light will shew its evil to some still more strongly: it was sin that nailed the

Saviour to the cross,—when He who knew no sin became sin for us,*—it was sin that put the cup of wrath into His hands, that caused Him to taste the “bitter pains of eternal death,” “that we might live through Him.” Sin has accomplished all this : here surely is a striking exhibition of its true nature and malignity, and of the folly,—the senseless folly,—of those who make light of it,—who “*make a mock at it.”

But we have a second part of our subject, which is no less true, and to which we will now willingly direct our attention : “But among the righteous there is favour.”

Who are we to understand by the righteous ? We know it cannot refer to any who are still in a state of nature, nay, nor even to any man in any state, (whether of nature or grace,) as taken by himself. “What then?” (says St. Paul,) “are we better than they? No, in no wise : for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin ; as it is written, ‘There is none righteous, no not one.’”† This is the state of all by nature, and of all—even the regenerate—taken by themselves, and not looked upon as they are “in the Beloved,”

* 2 Cor. v. 21.

† Rom. iii. 9, 10.

—accepted in the Lord their Righteousness. This only—this union with Christ their head—can make any of the church righteous in the sight of God : a man becomes righteous by the imputation of Christ's righteousness to him, and by this means only, and he stands in that righteousness accepted and complete. St. John has these remarkable words in his first Epistle, "He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous."* Now we cannot understand this to mean, that any man can do righteousness—as Christ did, and thus equal him in holiness, for this would go to the fulfilling of the whole law of God, which no man ever did : no, but "he that doeth righteousness," he that desires and endeavours to do the will of God in the way of righteousness, has a clear witness and token that he is interested in Christ, and a partaker of his spotless righteousness : and it is only as we are accepted in that righteousness, that we can possibly stand accepted in the sight of God, and be justified in His presence at the last. It is the work of the Holy Ghost upon the heart, (and oh ! that all here may be deeply concerned to experience it,—

* 1 John, iii. 7.

may be made willing in the day of God's power,) it is the work of the Holy Ghost upon the heart, which is the grand manifestation of a work of mercy *already wrought* in the sinner: there is a clear discovery that such an one is accepted already in the Beloved, that he is one to whom the righteousness of Christ Jesus has been imputed, so that he is justified, reckoned and accounted *righteous* in the sight of God. These have been righteous in a covenant sense ("according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,"*) ever since they were chosen in Christ, which, we are told, was before the foundations of the world were laid; and they shall be righteous as long as He (in whose righteousness they stand accepted) exists, *i.e.* for ever and ever. But if we are convinced, as well we may be with God's word before us, that every one that "doeth righteousness,"—that he that truly desires and endeavours (however weak and unworthy his performances may be) to do the will of God,—is 'born of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven;' it is no less true, (and we may be as fully assured of this also,) that every child of God will desire to fulfil His will, and will, as St. Paul says, "delight in

* Acts ii. 23.

the law of God after the inward man.”* “Because ye are sons,” (says the Apostle,) “God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father,”† and by this Spirit we are made “partakers” of a new and “divine nature,”‡ —“born again,”—and as the Spirit worketh in us, we are inclined unto, and wish to do acts of righteousness, and true holiness. And in nothing is this new life more clearly manifested (wherever it is communicated), than by a deep and serious concern at the dreadful nature and consequences of sin: so that, so far from being willing to make light of sin, and to “make a mock at sin,” such a man, (a regenerate man,) is trembling under apprehensions of its awful nature, and dreadful consequences: and it is only, as he is assured that the requirements of God’s law have been fulfilled, and its penalty suffered in his stead, by One who is “mighty to save,”§ that he can find peace for his soul. This righteousness therefore, wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, is evidenced by an earnest application for mercy, a simple and only application to the Saviour of sinners, and a simple and entire trust and confidence in Him: and again it is evidenced by what we have

* Rom. vii. 22. + Gal. iv. 6. † 2 Peter, i. 4. § Isaiah lxiii. 1.

before mentioned, by an earnest desire from a principle of gratitude and love, to do His will, and to show forth His praise, to walk in His ways, and to adorn that doctrine, which the sinner, and he that makes a mock at sin, so highly disgraces. In few words then we repeat that, in this way only can a man be *righteous* in the sight of God, by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, received and applied by faith, and thereby made manifest: which faith indeed, being wrought by the Holy Ghost, will in its very nature (as far as this weak and wicked flesh permits), produce the fruits of love to Jesus, and all works of righteousness in obedience to his will.

Now “among the righteous,” (says the text,) “there is favour:” or as some render it (though the sense is the same) “the righteous are in favour.” But with whom? Not with the world, —“Marvel not,” said our Lord, “if the world hate you, it hated me,”*—not with the wicked who scoff at sin, and make a mock at sin,—no, they will mock on, (if God change not their hearts,) till they themselves are mocked by mocking devils. No, but they are in favour

* Cf. 1 John iii. 13, and John xv. 18.

with the righteous, with the children of God, though mocked at by the children of the devil: and more than all, and better than all, they are in favour with the great and glorious Lord God Almighty, who rules and governs all things in heaven and earth. He restrains the enmity of the wicked within bounds which they cannot pass, yea, 'even the wrath of men shall praise Him.*' So that, we can say with regard to those who make a mock at sin, and who scoff and mock at those who are taught to hate sin, and endeavour to do the will of God, (for such there are my brethren, the heart of man is *now* as full of enmity against God's people as ever it was, and it will show itself in proportion as it is provoked by the truth of God, and as it is permitted by an overruling Providence,) whenever we discover this hatred, we can take up the Psalmist's words "Let them curse, but bless thou."† Do thou but bless, and let who will mock on! Thy favour is of more worth than all besides: thy frowns indeed we cannot bear, but if thou bless, who can injure us? "Let them curse"—it is a matter of indifference when thou art pleased to shine upon us—"Let

* Psalm lxxvi. 10. † Psalm cix. 28.

them curse but bless thou." "I wot that he whom thou blessest" (we may say with wicked Balak,) "is blessed indeed."* The righteous are in favour with God, and His favour—His "lovingkindness—is better than life itself."† Who can tell its extent, who can measure the favour of the Lord? The covenant which originated in His favour to us is said to be "ordered in all things and sure."‡ It extends to every thing that can be conceived, or that can happen to us, to show forth the love of God to those with whom it is made. But the grand manifestation of God's favour towards those who are righteous in His sight, was in the gift of His only begotten and beloved Son, "God so loved the world," (it is said,—had such favour towards it—) "that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."§ "Herein is love," (says St. John,) "not that we loved God"—not that we had any favour to Him, no, the heart of man by nature is at enmity with God,—there is no love or fear of God in it,—"not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."||

* Num. xxii. 6. † Psalm lxiii. 3. ‡ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

§ John iii. 16. || 1 John iv, 10.

Now this favour on the part of God has several most important properties, remarked in Scripture, which we must not pass over. It is not only distinguishing, but it is sovereign, free, and everlasting. Those, who are in a state of favour with the great Jehovah—the righteous mentioned in our text, the justified in Jesus—are not the whole race of Adam: there are some, thank God, who have favour with Him; but there are many, alas!—with the utmost stretch of charity we cannot but say it, when we consider the conduct and conversation of the “wicked who make a mock at sin,”—that they are not in His favour. Now this was equally and fully deserved by us all my brethren; we were by nature children of wrath, even as others, and if any of us are in God’s favour, while others are not,—if God in His mercy hath made us to differ—we can trace it only and altogether to His sovereign will and pleasure. “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”* He “giveth no account” of such matters to His gainsayers, who would rather quarrel with His ordinances, than accept

* Rom. ix. 15.

His mercy. There is but one answer to any child of man who dares to question Him, and say, "Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will?" And that the Apostle gives us "Nay but, O man, who art thou"—who art thou, creature of the most High, whom He can crush in a moment, small dust of the balance swept away (were such His will) in an instant!—"who art thou that repliest against God?" Who art thou to bring down the government of heaven and earth to the bar of thy puny judgment? "Hath not the potter power over the clay?"* Has not God an undoubted right to 'do what He will with His own.' 'Is thine eye evil, because He is good and merciful?' † But then again, this favour is *free*. They are not objects of His favour, because they are righteous; but they are righteous because they were objects of His favour. "Ye have not chosen me," said our Lord to His disciples, "but I have chosen you, and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit." ‡ "For we are His workmanship," says the Apostle, "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." §

* Rom. ix. 19-21. † Matt. xx. 15. ‡ John xv. 16. § Eph. ii. 10.

God's love was fixed upon them,—His favour was towards His people,—long before they knew anything of a work of righteousness in their hearts,—aye, if the word of God be true, before they were born, or the world began. It was the act of His own sovereign will and pleasure. And then it is an everlasting favour,—everlasting in its origin, and everlasting in its continuance: “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me,” (saith the prophet Jeremiah,) “saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore” —(as the consequence of love fixed on thee in eternity past)—“with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”* And as it is everlasting in its origin,—this favour of God towards Jesus Christ the Righteous, and His people in Him—so will it be everlasting in its continuance,—‘Whom He loveth, He loveth to the end,’ there is “no variableness” with Him, nor turning, “nor shadow of turning.”† There will never come the time, when Jehovah will cease to show favour to “the vessels of mercy, which he hath afore prepared unto glory,”‡—and that for His dear Son's sake. How striking is the language of the Psalmist, “The mercy of the LORD is from

* Jeremiah. xxxi. 3. † James i. 17. ‡ Rom. ix. 23.

everlasting to everlasting”—it is from eternity past, and it is to eternity to come—“upon them that fear Him,”* or as our text says, “upon the righteous” (the work of the Spirit upon the heart convincing them of sin, and leading them to Jesus, is thus manifested—by fearing God and working righteousness). This mercy, this favour, this love is from everlasting to everlasting. Oh! my brethren, if these marks are found in you, however faintly, —if you have ceased to mock at sin, and been taught to entertain the fear of God instead, and to work righteousness, however unworthy that name, in the faith of Jesus, what cause have you for thankfulness and gratitude to God! If you are in earnest about the state of your souls, and about their salvation, depend upon it this would never have happened, if the Eternal Father had not *chosen* you to life and salvation, and the Eternal Son *redeemed* you with His most precious blood: if not, the Holy Spirit would never have thus *enlightened* you: there never would have been such a “token for good”† upon your souls. But if these tokens, these marks of grace, these earnestings of the Spirit

* Psalm ciii. 17. † Psalm lxxxvi. 17.

be on you—to what glorious and delightful prospects, as well as present possessions, do they lead! They lead you, first of all, to consider the love of God as fixed upon you in Christ, before the foundations of the world were laid: He set His heart upon you, and appointed you to salvation, when you were yet in your sins, dead in them, and so quickened you. “You hath he quickened,” (says St. Paul,) “who were dead in trespasses and sins,”*—quickened by “God who is rich in mercy,” it is said again, “for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins.”† How frequently is His love spoken of in this light in the Scripture! And how delightful is the thought of it, when we consider its permanent and abiding nature,—that no power of darkness, and no ingratitude or rebellion of our own hearts, shall ever alter that affection which He bears His people, but that they shall be “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”‡ The closest and most binding contracts among men, are taken to represent the nearness of the union between Christ and His Church: yes, there subsists as close, and intimate, and (this is the grand idea)

* Eph. ii. 1. † Eph. ii. 4. 5. ‡ 1 Peter i. 5.

as indissoluble, as unchangeable a union, between the Lord (who loveth,) and His Church (which is beloved,) as there is in the marriage union. And so the Prophet says, “Thy maker is *thine husband*, the LORD of Hosts is His name;”* and the Lord, alluding to this, says for the comfort of His people that “He hates putting away,”† that ‘those whom God hath joined together must not be put asunder;’‡—and if He hates this in His creatures, He will not follow it Himself. He is ‘the Lord,’ it is said, ‘and changes not, therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed.’§ Oh! well may they admire the love of God, and be continually showing forth His praise, who have scriptural ground and warrant to conclude that they are partakers of His love: for He that hath begun to do them good, will never turn away from doing them good. “We are confident,” (says the Apostle,) “of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”|| That covenant which was entered into for their salvation, was entered into for an everlasting salvation—“ready to be revealed in

* Isaiah liv. 5. + Malachi ii. 16. † Matt. xix. 6.

§ Malachi iii. 6. || Phil. i. 6.

the last time.”* As truly as the blessed Trinity in the Godhead, covenanted for the redemption, and the regeneration of the vessels of mercy, so surely did they covenant to fulfil this first grand promise—even eternal life, “which,” says St. Paul to Titus, “God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.”†

Now if these things are so, my brethren, and I trust I have given you Scripture warrant for all that has been advanced, then you, who are partakers of this blessing (and which is manifest to you by that faith which is the gift of God, and by which you receive and appropriate it,) may well learn to leave yourselves, and everything you are and have, in the hands of Him, in whose sight you have favour. The Lord has favour unto you,—unto you who believe,—you are in favour with Him, and everything is under His direction: there is not a trial, or affliction, or sickness, or accident, or temptation that can befall you, or that can be sent upon you, that is not by the permission of Him “who loveth you.” Is there not assurance in this, that whatever it is, it is among ‘the all things which shall work together for good to

* 1 Peter i. 5. † Titus i. 2.

you? '* Leave yourselves therefore cheerfully in his hands. "My times," (said the Psalmist in his affliction,) "are in thy hand:" † everything that concerns me, is ordered in all things and sure; he could therefore give this counsel in the last verse of the same Psalm, "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD." ‡

And then, again, what encouragement is here to 'come boldly to the throne of grace, to find help in time of need,' § yea, 'in all things by prayer and supplication to make our requests known unto God:' || it is pouring out your hearts to one who loveth you, and in whose favour you are,—and in Christ have ever been,—notwithstanding your offences. In Christ your elder brother, you can look up to Him as your Father, who is greater than all; then what may you not expect from Him? He is said to "ride in the heavens" for your help: all things are in His power: and He is represented as having given—because He can give nothing more, as having given His own self unto His people,—“their portion for ever.” “I will be a

* Rom. viii. 28. † Psalm xxxi. 15. ‡ Psalm xxxi. 24.

§ Heb. iv. 16. || Phil. iv. 6.

Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters,"*—‘how much more shall your heavenly Father know how to give good gifts to them that ask Him?’† Now these are the truths, which work upon the minds of men—of believers in them,—to make them devoted to the honour and glory of God, to live in righteousness and true holiness. He that is really righteous in Christ, “accepted in the Beloved,”‡ “found in him,”§ (as St. Paul says,) growing in grace through the word of God properly understood and applied, has this view and feeling, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?”|| How can I ever be sufficiently devoted to His praise, and honour, and glory? These are the views which tend to make a sinner hate himself on account of sin, as well as hate sin and have done with it. “Then shall ye remember your own evil ways,” says the Prophet, “and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities, and for your abominations.”¶ When is this? Why, when God has cleansed them from their filthiness, and given them a new heart, having taken away the stony one. There

* 2 Cor. vi. 18. † Matt. vii. 11. ‡ Eph. i. 6. § Phil. iii. 9.

|| Psalm cxvi. 12. ¶ Ezek. xxxvi. 31.

is nothing like a sweet sense of sins forgiven, and assurance of Jehovah's favour, to make a man loathe himself on account of his sinfulness, —to make a man hate his sins, and have done with them. Thus we find in another place in Scripture, that after the manifestation of God's favour, Ephraim could say, "What have I to do any more with idols?"* This we say is the tendency of the doctrines of grace: it is not, as was slanderously reported of the Apostles, and which has been from time to time repeated to the present day, to make us "sin that grace may abound," no, "God forbid."† They are the doctrines of grace, which touch the feelings and the hearts of men: which lay a man sensibly under deep convictions of his own debt of gratitude, and lead him to desire to show it forth. Hear the Psalmist's expression, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my Redeemer."‡ It was knowing God as his strength, and Redeemer, that led him to wish, that all that he thought or spoke, might be according to His will. As if he had said, 'Thou hast redeemed me from death;

* Hosea xiv. 8. † Rom. vi. 1, 2. ‡ Psalm xix. 14.

I am justified and supported in and by thee : what therefore shall I render unto thee, for all thy great and abundant goodness.'

But there is not a child of God upon earth, who longs after these things, who has these spiritual desires, and who does not know that he comes far short of what He wishes,—that is not constrained with St. Paul to cry out, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” “I see a law in my members,” (in my flesh,) “warring against the law of my mind,” (the will of the Spirit): “when I would do good, evil is present with me:” “the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do.”* We repeat, there is not a child of God, that is not thus exercised, and among the trials and distresses to which he is exposed, the inward trials, and spiritual distresses of his heart, are some of the greatest. Now the time is coming, my brethren, when you shall drop the “earthly house of this tabernacle,”† and with it you shall drop the body of sin and death: the time is coming when you shall not know sin at all, not in this dispensation, as some would

* Rom. vii. 24, 23, 21, 19. † 2 Cor. v. 1.

tell you is possible, but 'who deceive themselves and the truth is not in them,' no, but "as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." All God's children "are predestinated," (says St. Paul,) "to be conformed to the image of His Son."* "The first man Adam was made a living soul"—he was of the earth, earthy—and we have borne his image: "the last Adam is a quickening spirit,"—"the Lord from heaven,"† whose image we have yet to be conformed to, "when that which is perfect is come," when we bear the image of the heavenly. The heaven of heavens will be to be with Jesus, and to be like Him; but what heaven would it be, if we were not conformed to His image and likeness? Holiness, perfect holiness, is the essence of heaven; without it shall no man see the Lord; and, therefore the Psalmist says, "I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness"‡—holy as thou art holy,—perfect as thou art perfect,—this will be enough, when I see thee as thou art, awake after thine image, and am with thee where thou art, to cast my crown at thy feet, and give thee the honour and glory of my salvation. Oh! then,

* Rom. viii. 29. † 1 Cor. xv. 49, 45, 47. ‡ Psalm xvii. 15.

look forward my brethren to the blessed time, when you shall be free from sin. The whole will then be found to be a matter of rich and sovereign grace. It is a striking passage which has reference to this part of our subject,—a passage which expresses the feelings of the Children of Israel, when they entered the land of Canaan, “They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them; but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance;”^{*}—they were indebted to God alone and altogether for their temporal salvation, (and this was meant to prefigure the eternal salvation, the incorruptible inheritance of God’s people): they were indebted to Him entirely, and why was it? “Because,” (says the Psalmist,) “thou hadst a favour unto them.”[†] God set His heart upon them, “You only,” He said, “have I known of all the families of the earth;”[‡] and they represented the true and spiritual Israel of God, and because He had, of His own free, rich, and sovereign goodwill and pleasure, a favour unto them.

Oh! may that favour, which is manifested to the righteous—that distinguishing favour—be

^{*} Psalm xliv. 3. [†] Psalm xliv. 3. [‡] Amos iii. 2.

shown to be the lot and portion of all that are here present to-day; present before Him, who knows every heart,—who knows everyone who feels on account of sin, and is anxious to be partaker of His great salvation: and oh! that He would direct such as these, as He will, into the way of peace: and who knows, too, everyone, who is inclined to “make a mock at sin;” and let me tell all such that there is no “mocking at sin” in heaven, and there is no “mocking at sin” in hell. However men may be inclined to mock at sin, and mock at righteousness too here on earth, there is nothing of the kind to be found where they can either hope, or fear, to be *hereafter*. And we say too, that he that mocks at sin, is mocking at righteousness, and mocking at *eternal life*, and mocking at *eternal death*: he is mocking at the mercy of God, and at His wrath: he is mocking at the great and dear Redeemer: he is mocking at God himself. Now if these things be true, what must be the consequence of such conduct persevered and persisted in? What must be the end of those who live and die making a mock at sin? Are they not rightly named fools in the text? And oh! that He

would be pleased to open their eyes, and turn their hearts from their present folly, 'to the wisdom of the just, that at His second coming, we may be a people acceptable in His sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

SERMON III.

MALACHI iii. 2, 3.

“But who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap:

“And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.”

IN the first verse of this chapter, we have placed before us the Elias,—the messenger of the Lord,—who was to announce the coming of the Lord, “Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me.” So far

this prophecy might be referred exclusively, as it generally is, to our Lord's *first* coming, and to His forerunner John the Baptist. John's ministry certainly was in some sense a fulfilment of this prophecy, as we read in the beginning of St. Mark's gospel, "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; as it is written in the prophets," (this prophet Malachi,) "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee,"—(or again in Isaiah, xl. 3) "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."* John's ministry, I repeat, was clearly in some sense a fulfilment of this prophecy, but it did not completely fulfil it: as the advent which he preceded, did not completely fulfil the prophecies of the "great day of the Lord,"—the glory of his kingdom. The Scriptures, I think, plainly teach us this; the angel of the Lord that appeared to Zacharias, after promising him a son, and commanding him to call his name John, said "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the *spirit and power* of Elias."† He was not the *very*

* Mark i. 1-3. † Luke i. 16, 17.

Elias, as he himself said “He confessed, and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou *Elias*? And he saith, I am *not*.”—“I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet *Esaias*.”* So that it was *typically* that John fulfilled this prophecy, and when our Lord says that “*Elias* is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed,” it is clear it must be understood in this sense,—typically for some other person; for in the same conversation with Peter and James and John, (as they descended from the mount, where “He was transfigured before them,”) “they asked him, saying, why say the Scribes that *Elias* must first come? And he answered and told them, *Elias* verily cometh first,” (*i.e.*, will come first,) “and restoreth all things.”† Certainly in no sense whatever, can the event of John’s ministry be called “the restoring of all things.” The Scribes then appear to have interpreted the Scriptures correctly, when they say that a messenger will precede the second and glorious advent of our Lord,—that “*Elias* will first come,”—but what this ultimate coming of

* John i. 20-23.

† Mark ix. 11-13.

Elias (or Elijah,) means, a future day,—the last times,—must declare. The fact is clearly revealed in the last two verses of this prophecy, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” Probably it is to make known to the Jews that Christ, (whom they crucified,) is indeed their long-looked for Messiah, to reconcile them to this truth, and to restore them to their own land; a prophet among his own people, as it is said of Him in the last verse of this prophet, “And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”* The words of our text allude to the same event,—“And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple,”—in its full meaning surely these words must refer to the yet unfulfilled prophecy, described in the prophet Ezekiel, and the solemn occupation of the last temple in the last times.† “And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in:”—why do believers delight in this messenger

* Malachi iv. 5, 6.

† See Ezekiel xliii. 1-17.

or Angel of the Covenant? Because he is the bearer of the glad tidings to the Church, of the Covenant which he has made for their salvation, with the eternal Father:—"Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts. But who may abide," continues our text, "the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth?"* There is a fearful description of the "day of his coming" in the first verse of the next chapter, "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."† This description certainly does not characterize either the merciful intent of Christ's first advent, nor the meekness, and forbearance, and longsuffering of our blessed Saviour in the days of His flesh: neither have the wicked been destroyed, as it is here promised, so that neither root nor branch of them is left! No, this clearly must apply to that great day St. Paul speaks of in his Epistle to the Thessalonians, "When," at the end of this dispensation, "the Lord Jesus

* Malachi iii. 1, 2. † Malachi iv. 1.

shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe in that day.* And so after this fearful description in the prophet Malachi, it is said, "But unto you that fear my name"—who believe on, love, worship, and serve me—"shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of Hosts."† The entire subjection, and destruction of the wicked, and the triumph of the people of God, must be referred to the second and glorious advent of our Lord Jesus Christ; and also the "rising of the Sun of Righteousness upon them that fear his name," *i.e.*, the vindication of the people of God in all those rights, and in all that glory, which is their due, as the "brethren and joint-heirs of Christ."

"Who," then, "may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He ap-

* 2 Thess. i. 7, 8, 10.

† Malachi iv. 2, 3.

peareth? For He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." There is no doubt that these words, like the rest of the prophecy, refer to events connected with our Lord's second coming. In the days of His flesh, He expressly disclaimed the character of judge and divider,—“Man,” he said on one occasion, “who made me a judge or a divider over you?”* But He as clearly claims it for Himself when He shall come again in His kingdom,—“in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ,”† and this is his character here symbolized by the “refiner's fire,” and the “fullers' soap.” At the same time we know from other prophecies that the priesthood of Levi is to be restored, and that acceptable offerings are again to be offered in Zion,—which doubtless is the fact referred to in the words of our text, “he shall purify *the sons of Levi*,—that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.” “Then,” says the following verse, “shall the offering of Judah

* Luke xii. 14.

† Rom. ii. 16.

and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years." You will find this plainly spoken of in the last chapter of Isaiah, "And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the LORD out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the LORD, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD: and I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD: for as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain."* And again in Jeremiah, "For thus saith the LORD; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel;" no, never, while the God-man Christ Jesus, (the son of David,) shall sit upon His throne for ever and for ever;—but, and mark this, "Neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually."† So that the purifying the sons of Levi,—the re-establish-

* Isaiah lxvi. 20-22. † Jer. xxxiii. 17, 18. See too 20, 21.

ment of their priesthood, and of their sacrifices in commemoration (not in anticipation as before-time) of Christ's spotless offering, will follow the Divine presence in the last temple, and is that refining, spoken of in the text, in its full and ultimate meaning.

There is, however, a very important sense, in which the Lord may be said, to be the "refiner and purifier" of His people in the present dispensation, and to which we will now direct our attention; considering firstly, the persons that are refined, and secondly, who is their Refiner, and how it is, and for what end it is, that He refines and purifies them.

And first for the persons who undergo this refining, we no longer confine our attention to the ultimate meaning of the prophecy, and to its ultimate fulfilment in the last times, as respects the natural sons of Levi, (restored to their own land, and again offering sacrifices on the mountain of the Lord); we have now in our eye that spiritual band spoken of by the Apostle, "That royal priesthood, holy nation, peculiar people,—which in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God,—which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."*

* 1 Peter ii. 9, 10.

They are now—*i.e.*, true believers in God and in Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent—are now the children of the Eternal Father, being born again of His Spirit,—made partakers of a new and divine nature,—they are the Lord's anointed ones, anointed of the Holy Ghost, and set apart, or consecrated, or sanctified “a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”* They are sought out of the world, and severed, having been first “by the everlasting purpose of God, chosen in Christ out of mankind, as vessels made to honour,” † consecrated unto God as his peculiar people, or as St. John expresses it, “unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.” ‡ These are separated, not bodily, but in heart and mind, for their treasure is in heaven, and “where men's treasure is, there will their hearts be also.” § They are not separated, as the poor Romish monks and nuns separate themselves, and as many other foolish weak people separate themselves, by shutting themselves from the out-

* 1 Peter ii. 5. † 17th Article of Religion. ‡ Rev. i. 5, 6.
§ Matt. vi. 21.

ward world, and thinking that by their austerity and mock self-denial, they are doing God service; a man may retire to his cell from the cheerful light of day, or stop his ears against the busy hum of life, and yet carry the world in his heart; and others there are, engaged in the several stations of life in which it has pleased God to place them, who, though in the world, are not of the world, who, though perhaps not recognized by the world as God's people, or who are even despised and rejected, are "known of God," and have that faith wrought in them by His Spirit "which purifieth the heart," and "overcometh the world."*

These are they, who, though they "be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance," nor "love to pray standing in the corners of the streets" (as our Lord said) "that they may be seen of men,"†—these are they (born of God, indwelt by His Spirit,) who alone serve God, who alone can serve Him, who alone have any access to Him, who alone have any delight in Him, who alone can present unto Him any acceptable service. What an awful truth it is, my brethren, that though so many glorious things are spoken

* Cf. 1 John v. 4, 5.

† Matt. vi. 16, 5.

of the spiritual priesthood, so many blessed privileges attributable and belonging to the spiritual sons of Levi, yet that there is not one of the sons of men *unregenerate*, that ever did or ever can serve God. It is, I say, a solemn truth, but no less a truth to be kept in mind, and lived out by us; the life of the natural man, whatever he may think it, is made up of sin; for “without faith it is impossible to please God,”*—“whatsoever is not of faith is sin,”—without Christ he can do nothing, no man can come to the Father,—no man has access, no man can approach to God—but by Him.†

There is a great deal of what is called serving God in the world, which is just nothing more nor less than trying to serve one's self; look at all the self-inflicted duties, and privations, and penances of Popery,—or of that spirit of Popery which is so common among Protestants,—it is not the worship of God that prompts them, but will-worship, “for as long as people impose anything upon themselves, they do not deny their own will, but fulfil it,” and “even whilst they beat down the body,

* Heb. xi. 6.

† John xiv. 6.

they may" (it has been well said) "and do puff up the flesh."* The world, depend upon it my brethren, in all its sections,—by which I mean all of every class, religious or not, who are not regenerate, and ruled by the spirit of God;—are altogether given up to wilfulness, and selfishness, and till we exchange our own will for God's will, following His revealed will instead of our own, doing what God commands, and not what we impose upon ourselves, it is utterly impossible for us to please Him, to serve Him, or to put our whole trust in Him. And therefore we may say that the so-called services, self-denials, or duties of the natural man, (to whatever portion of the world he may belong, religious or otherwise,) are but gilded sins; whatever he may think of them, or whatever others may think of them, his heart not being right, the spirit that actuates it not being the true spirit, the actions must be wrong, and their appearance false. Always bear in mind, my brethren, that doing, and speaking, and believing what God commands in His word, and by His Spirit, that this, and this only is serving God, "He is a spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit

* Fuller.

and in truth :”* but all else, all the devices of men,—(what are called works of supererogation, *i.e.*, works done of our own free-will, beyond what the revealed will of God demands,)—that all these, (being self-imposed,) “are not pleasant to God,” as our thirteenth article says, “forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ,—yea, rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin.” No matter what the professed motive for them may be—it may be for the glory of God, or the welfare of men’s souls,—there is not a crime, however fearful, that has not been perpetuated under these excuses, nay, with a firm belief on the part of the actors in them, that they were showing glory to God, and goodwill to men. You remember what St. Paul said of himself, in his ignorance and unbelief, “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth; which thing I also did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them, and I punished

* John iv. 24.

them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme.”* And all this time Saul thought he was doing what he ought to do,—fulfilling his duty. Or again, you remember what our Lord himself said to His disciples, when about to leave them, “These things have I spoken to you, that ye should not be offended; they shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.”† If therefore crimes like these can be committed, not only under the pretence, but with the actual belief that those who commit them are serving God,—are doing that which they ought to do,—who shall say, that the motives which prompt us to every good word and work, do not require to be narrowly scrutinized, that the spirit which actuates us, ought not to be tried by the test of God’s word, lest perhaps we be influenced by the evil spirit, instead of the good, or at least by our own deceived minds, and deceitful hearts? Satan, we know, can assume the form of an angel of light, to suit his purposes,‡ and I believe in these latter days of head-knowledge, and religious profession, that is a guise he often

* Acts xxvi. 9-11. † John xvi. 1, 2. ‡ 2 Cor. xi. 14.

wears, to entrap the unwary, and that many a soul has thus been borne to hell, in a golden dream of acquiring heaven. How then shall we meet this adversary, who we are told, “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour?” What says St. Peter, “whom resist, steadfast in the faith.”* What says St. James, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”† And so St. Paul tells us, to strike with “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.”‡ Compare your thoughts and your opinions, (however conscientious they may be,) with the written word of God,—“to the law and to the testimony” with them,—whenever anything is suggested to the mind to be done, or to be left undone, for the glory of God, or it is supposed ought to be done for His service—“to the law and to the testimony, if it be not according to these, it is because there is no truth in it.”§ “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith”—|| “try the spirits”¶ of what sort they are, by this test, “prove all things, hold fast that which is good.”** Oh! my brethren, till this examination—this proving all

* 1 Peter v. 8, 9. † James iv. 7. ‡ Eph. vi. 17. § Isaiah viii. 20.

|| 2 Cor. xiii. 5. ¶ 1 John iv. 1. ** 1 Thess. v. 1.

things—in the light of God's word, by the searching of His Spirit, is submitted to, I despair of showing you how much we require our best deeds, our purest motives, to be “refined and purified.” It is thus only that we shall learn what sin is, that we shall learn its exceeding sinfulness, and the consequent value, the inestimable value of the Saviour of sinners: the very duties of a natural man,—what he thinks he ought to do,—are sin, (“whatsoever is not of faith is sin”*) : nay, the services of the religious devotee,—when he thinketh he doeth God service,—if springing from any other motive than confidence in God for Christ's sake, are nothing worth, (“without faith it is impossible to please God.”†) The natural conscience is a rule sufficient to condemn a man,—for even *it* requires more of us than we can perform,—but it must be rectified, and strengthened, and expanded, and purified by the revealed will of God, (by word and spirit,) before it can be taken for a guide. And therefore we say again that the duties of the natural man are, and must be, sin. For till he knows what sin is, and till he knows what Christ is,

* Rom. xiv. 23. † Heb. xi. 6.

and till he has received the gospel by faith,—that faith which is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,”*—his heart and conscience are wrong with God, and these being wrong, his actions never can be right. No tree of a bad sort can produce good fruit,—it must first be grafted with the better,—neither is there any true fruit antecedent to faith, faith is the life of the new creature, the very breath he breathes, and all the precious fruits of the Spirit are in a measure the offshoots of faith, and as the life of the tree is low and weakly, so are the branches and the fruit dwarfed and immature, and as the life is strong, so are the offshoots strong and ripe and healthy; a man’s walk with God is in direct proportion to his faith, and before he believed in Jesus, there was no true service to the living God. Look at Paul, or rather Saul unregenerate,—“he verily thought he ought to do many things against Jesus of Nazareth,”† he thought he was serving God all the while,—(and how many are there who by one device or another, some by their profession and fair talk on religious matters, others by their good works,

* Heb. xi. 1.

† Acts xxvi. 9.

think verily they are doing God service, but who, doing all from a slavish spirit of fear, or from self-interest,—getting something in return—and not from “faith which worketh by love,”* are just as wide of the mark, as the Apostle was); but look again at Paul the Apostle, purified from his self-righteousness, and relying only on the Lord his Righteousness, “counting all things” (that before he gloried in—his law-righteousness,) “but loss,”—treading it under foot as “dung that he might win Christ, and be found in Him, not having his own righteousness which was of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith;”†—what is his language now? “To me, says he, to live is Christ,”‡ he had His blood sprinkled on his conscience, His love shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost, and this love of Christ constrained him to live no longer to himself, but to Him who died for him and rose again. Oh! what a blessed confession of faith is this, and what an example of the power of faith, “To me to live is Christ;” ‘This is that for which I live, I have derived my life’ (spiritual as well as natural) ‘from Him, I live in simple

* Gal. v. 6. + Phil. iii. 8. 9. † Phil. i. 21.

dependence on Him;’ “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,”* and now I would live to Him, drawing all my life from Him who is “the resurrection and the life,”†—“The way, the truth, and the life,” ‡—(“Christ my life,”—“my life being hid with Christ in God,”§) I would now live to Him; in this affliction, or in that trial: in this strait, in that perplexity: in this sorrow to be felt, in that cross to be borne,—in sickness, or in health, in all the dispensations and openings of Providence, this would I say, “To me to live is Christ.” This is the language of one, who rejoiced in a perfect righteousness out of himself, who knew himself too well to expect to find it within, (“I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing;”||) of one who gloried in standing complete in the Lord Jesus Christ, who felt the plague of his own heart, and knew that ever, and to the end of time, “the flesh lusteth against the spirit,”¶ the carnal mind of man against the Holy Spirit of God. He never expected to see wind and

* Gal. ii. 20. † John xi. 25. ‡ John xiv. 6. § Col. iii. 3, 4.
|| Rom. vii. 18. ¶ Gal. v. 17.

tide running together—no, they buffet and battle to the last. Depend upon it, my brethren, whoever talks of inherent righteousness, or of self-sanctification, or of prayer-giving sanctification, knows nothing of his own heart. But what was the aim, and what the prospect of this convicted, condemned, redeemed, and by the Spirit of God “refined and purified” sinner? “To me to live is Christ,—and to die is gain.” Oh! here is faith, and this is his faithful saying to all other poor, convicted, self-condemned, yet believing sinners, “For ye are dead” (crucified with Christ,) “and your life is hid with Christ in God; when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in Glory.” “If then ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God; set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”* Here is one, who had been himself through the fire, and knew well how to speak to those who were in it.

We have now to consider in the last place as well as our brief remaining time will permit, “Who is the Refiner of God’s people?” and

* Col. iii. 1-4.

“how it is, and for what end it is that he refines and purifies them?”

The Refiner is the Lord Jesus Christ, who at His second coming shall “throughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into His garner,”* who “shall separate His sheep from the goats”† that pasture with them, who shall judge the living Church at His appearing, and the dead when His kingdom is established. It is He too, before whose judgment-seat all His people appear arraigned by His Spirit day by day, and hour by hour, “giving account of themselves”‡ by confession and prayer to God. God and man in one Christ, “who searcheth the heart,” and judgeth it, and yet to those who are in Him,—members of His body,—how near and dear the relationship! “Members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.”§ Who stands related to us as the great Head of His body—the Church,—given us by the Father in the Covenant for that end and object, who lived for us in this poor world of sin and sorrow, who died for us,—was made a curse for us, bore our curse in His own body on the tree,—was buried, rose again, and (if we be risen with

* Matt. iii. 12. † Matt. xxv. 32. ‡ Rom. xiv, 12. § Eph. v. 30.

Him) ever liveth to make intercession for us, our "Advocate with the Father"—if any man sin,—though we be guilty, He is righteousness—the only righteous one—and "the propitiation for our sins."* This is our Refiner, and Purifier. And how is it He carries on His work? Fire would seem to be the dreadful instrument in the latter day of "burning up the chaff,"—that only which passed for wheat, mere professors and pretenders,—as well as those "who know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,†"—your open infidels and gainsayers, those who bear the 'mark of the beast' openly on their foreheads, or secretly in their hands, while professing to protest against him,—to all such our "God is a consuming fire."‡ But how will this figure hold, when applied to the gracious work of our Redeemer, when purifying and refining the affections and understandings of His people? The idea of the Lord's purifying by fire, clearly marks it to be that which is mighty, and piercing, and penetrating, and overcoming. We know that fire can dissolve the hardest rocks, that fire can melt the closest

* 1 John ii. 1, 2. † 2 Thess. i. 8. ‡ Heb. xii. 29.

metals: we know that fire can burn the loveliest cities—we have had sad proof of that of late years in many parts of the world,—can lay prostrate the noblest forests, can waste the fairest fields; we know that when the day of the Lord cometh, of which remember, “fire and vapour of smoke”* are prognostications—remember that and be watchful, that “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”—This shall be done by fire—to make way for the “new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”† This shows the expression to be a strong one, if interpreted spiritually,—which it must be if applied to spiritual men. And in this sense, “the Word of God” is called a fire in Scripture, and is the principal means of purifying the heads and hearts of believers. “Is not my word like a fire, saith the Lord?”‡ And by that fire He can melt the heart, and warm the heart, and purify the heart. “Sanctify them,” prayed our Lord for His disciples, “through thy truth: thy word is truth.”§ There are two instances

* Acts ii. 19. + 2 Peter iii. 10, 13. † Jer. xxiii. 29. § John xvii. 17.

among many in Holy Writ, that I would point out to you where we are shown the great effect of the Word of God in melting, and purifying the heart, when that Word comes in the power of the Holy Ghost. The first is in 2 Samuel, xii. 1-14.; David was the subject of it, and as it would appear, blind and self-deceived, till the Prophet of the Lord showed him the true state of his heart, by a parable. He saw the poor man, and his "one little ewe lamb," and the rich man with his "flocks and herds," he could see too the horrible injustice, and wicked want of equity in the case put to him, and could say "As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die." Self-ignorance indeed! "And Nathan said to David—Thou art the man." I recommend the whole chapter to your attention, that you may see how the Word of God can melt and humble a man, and can make him cry from the inmost recesses of his heart, "I have sinned against the Lord." O then too we see the blessed end, the intention of this purifying and refining, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die." The other instance I mentioned, is recorded in 2 Cor. vii., and was the effect of God's Word

in a letter of St. Paul's; he says in the eighth verse, "Though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent though I did repent; for I perceive that the same Epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season." "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! in all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter."* This again is the effect of God's Word, when applied by His Spirit—it "purifieth the heart," it "worketh by love." But then, there are other fires that God makes use of, there is the fire of trials and troubles, and the furnace of afflictions. In former times, you know, there were literal fires, in the early ages of the Church, and in the first days of the Reformation, there were scorching flames, and fierce tortures, and cruel "mockings and scourgings" to try the saints of God,—aye and "the trial of their faith, being much more precious than of gold which perisheth, though

* 2 Cor., vii. 11.

it be tried with fire, will be found unto praise, and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."* Thank God, in the present day we know nothing of persecution; the law of the land, or rather the law of God's providence restrains it: it may be that we shall never know what it is (as our fathers did,) to suffer the loss of liberty, or property, or life for our "most holy faith,"—I pray God it may be so, "nevertheless," says the Scriptures, "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution, evil men and seducers waxing worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived:"† and truly, whilst we are in a world lying in wickedness, believers must not be surprised or dismayed, if the god of this world, knowing his time to be short,—knowing that God shall "bruise him under our feet shortly," shall work us all the woe he can; at all events there will be the sneer, the scorn, the reproach, the contumely, and the unkindness of those who are of the contrary part. But again, others will be tried by the ordinary trials and afflictions of life. Loss of friends! Who knows not this, by death or otherwise? Loss of health! Those

* 1 Peter, i. 7. † 2 Tim. iii. 12, 13.

who have known most of it, best can tell how great a trial that is, to spend year after year in a sick chamber, in pain and suffering. Or, again, to fall into deep poverty, (perhaps through sickness or want of employment;) alas, that is a great trial, God knoweth! And there is yet another,—for a believer to fall into sin; by his actions to bring discredit on the name of his Lord and Master. O how hard will they be upon him, who never felt what sin is! Truly those who think themselves without sin, will be the first to cast stones at him: but however hard Pharisees may strike him,—if he be a true child of God,—they will give him no blows so heavy as those he will give himself. This has sometimes been the fire, in which God has tried, aye, and in a measure *purified* His people; their fault being their own, their sin being in themselves, they having no excuse, have been left, as it were, to be their own chastisers. And who can say what are the trials and temptations which Satan places before us? And how, if we are unwatchful, and careless, and thoughtless, he comes in and takes advantage? This life, my brethren, to the end is the time of conflict, of chastening, nay, with

God's people of judgment (and the only judgment they will have) "for," says St. Paul, speaking of Christian believers, "when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world,"*—the world will be judged, and condemned, but God's people will be (not at the bar, but) on the judgment seat—"what, know ye not," asks St. Paul, "that the saints shall judge the world? Know ye not that we shall judge angels?"† 'Judge therefore yourselves brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord.' This is the time for your judgment, that hereafter ye may be able "to offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." "For the time is come," writes St. Peter eighteen hundred years ago, "that judgment must begin at the house of God;"—from that time to this has that judgment been carried on,—"and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?"‡ Ah! "who of them may abide the day of His coming, and who shall stand when He appeareth?" But, says St. Peter, looking forward to whatever might happen to the Church—"Beloved, think it not strange

* 1 Cor. xi. 32. † 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3. ‡ 1 Peter iv. 17.

concerning the fiery trial which is to try you," (*i.e.*, in this life) "as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you—on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified." "Wherefore," thus He sums up, "let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator."*

* 1 Peter, iv. 12-14, 19.

SERMON IV.

ST. MATTHEW vii. 13, 14.

“Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

IN reading the Holy Scriptures, it is very necessary to ascertain, to whom the several parts which may be engaging our attention, are addressed; as a portion of Scripture which is strictly true as addressed to one class of

persons, might not, and probably would not be true, when applied to another class, to whom it was not addressed, and for whom it was not intended. For instance, there are many promises, as well as many historical facts, which are made to and spoken of the *Jews* as a nation; these clearly would not hold good, when applied to the *Gentiles*: many threatenings denounced against the enemies of God, which were never meant to be applied to His people: and in like manner, many great and precious truths addressed to the ‘children of God,’ which it would be both false and foolish, to consider as applicable to those whom our Lord called ‘children of the Devil.’* How necessary then, in reading the Epistles for example, to remark that they are addressed—‘to all that are beloved of God, called to be saints,’†—‘to the faithful in Christ Jesus,’‡—‘to the faithful brethren in Christ,’§—‘to the twelve tribes of Israel and Judah,’||—‘to the strangers throughout the world, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,’¶—or ‘to them that had obtained like precious faith with the

* Cf. John, viii. 44. † Rom. i. 7. ‡ Ephes. i. 1. § Col. i. 2.
 || James i. 1. ¶ 1 Peter, i. 1, 2.

Apostles.* I do not say that there are not many things in these Epistles which are true of others who have no pretensions to the character of those addressed; many unsound members of the several Churches are rebuked by name,—many wicked persons, and false professors judged, and anathematized by the Apostles,—but the doctrines of the Gospel which are unfolded, the promises that are dwelt on, and the comfort and consolations which are given, are only true and only to be applied, to those who are what they profess to be—“members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.”

Now this preliminary enquiry is necessary (among almost all other passages,) to the one I have chosen for a text. To whom is it, that our Lord refers, when He says “Enter *ye* in at the strait gate?” We must go back to the beginning of the fifth chapter to answer this question. In the last verse of the fourth, we are told that “there followed Him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from beyond Jordan;” “And seeing the multitudes,” (who followed

* 2 Peter i. 1.

Him probably to see the wondrous works which He did,) “ He went up into a mountain : and when He was set, *His disciples* came unto Him ; and He opened His mouth and taught *them*.” This teaching of our Lord to His disciples, which includes His directions and instructions to them on many subjects, extends over three chapters, and is generally called the sermon on the mount ; and at the beginning of the following chapter,—the eighth, we are told that “ when He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him ” again. It seems to have been a common practice with our Lord, to retire with His disciples apart from the multitude, and to instruct them in the mysteries, which it was given them to know and to understand ; thus in the thirteenth chapter, which contains the parable of the sower, we are told at the thirty-fourth verse, “ All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables,” and at the thirty-sixth verse, “ Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house : and *His disciples* came unto Him, saying, Declare unto *us* this parable.” It is evident that this sermon on the mount—of which our text is a part—was addressed, as I

have said, to His disciples only, and belongs therefore only to His disciples now. To no others can this language be addressed with truth. For what is that language? "Ye are the salt of the earth,"—that only which keeps it from falling into corruption and decay; "ye are the light of the world,"—that only which preserves it from darkness and destruction; and how else does He address them? As "the poor in Spirit," and "they that mourn," as "the meek," "the merciful," "the pure in heart," "the peacemakers,"—as "those who hunger and thirst after righteousness," and those "who are persecuted for righteousness' sake," and "those whom men should revile and persecute, and speak all manner of evil against falsely, for His name's sake."* Clearly this is true of none, but of the true disciples of Jesus; it was not then, it is not now; to them only is such language applicable, and it is to them, and them only, that our Lord addresses the words of our text "Enter *ye* in at the strait gate." I am the more anxious that this should be clearly seen and understood to be the case, as it is a text often quoted, to support a

* Matt. v. 13, 14, 3-11.

doctrine, most untrue with regard to man, and most dishonouring with respect to God,—viz. that the turning point (so to speak) in salvation is in man, and not in God,—that the will of man (as naturally constituted,) and the work of man, is sufficient to turn him from Satan unto God, that he can of himself repent, and believe, and come unto Christ, and work out his own salvation although the Word of God tells us expressly, that “it is God which worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”* Now I say that the text before us gives no countenance to this doctrine, and my first argument is, that it is not addressed to man as naturally constituted, no, nor as having received what is called ‘baptismal grace,’—for many are baptized outwardly who never experience the inward and spiritual grace,—but that the expression “Enter ye in at the strait gate,” is addressed to those only who are “born, not of blood,” (*i.e.*, not by natural generation,) “nor of the will of the flesh,” (not of a man’s own will, for “the carnal mind is enmity against God,”†) “nor of the will of man,” (nor of the will or power of any other man,) “but of

* Phil. ii. 13. † Rom. viii. 7.

God,"—"to those, to whom He gave" (and to whom He now gives,) "power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."* For as this discourse of 'the strait gate' is recorded by St. Luke, one of His disciples said unto Him, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" And what was our Lord's reply; "Strive to enter in at the strait gate;"—I do not tell you that there are *few* that shall be saved, but I tell you this, that "*many* will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."† Is it not clear then that the ability is not of man, but of God. Yes, many—nay all, who seek in their own strength, who will not seek it in God's way, but abide by their own, who will not deny their own will for God's will,—all these though they "seek to enter in, shall not be able." St. Paul tells us of some who are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."‡ They go to the wrong school,—not to the school of Christ, but to the school of man,—how then should they know 'the truth as it is in Jesus?' But what do we learn in the school of Christ? What does our great Master teach us? "Jesus

* John i. 12, 13. † Luke xiii. 23, 24. ‡ 2 Tim. iii. 7.

answered and said,"—(He had been telling them the Father's will "that of all which He hath given me I should lose nothing," and again "this is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day," and these doctrines (as they always do,) excited the anger of those who were not His, and we are told, "they murmured at Him,")—"and Jesus answered and said, murmur not among yourselves; no man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him;"* a strong expression, signifying that something like force must be used,—that when 'God worketh in us, to will and to do of His good pleasure,'† there is something very like resistance on our part,—that we like our own will and our own way of salvation, better than God's will and God's way,—that 'the flesh lusteth against'—is of a different mind and inclination to—'the Spirit, and the Spirit therefore against the flesh,'‡—that God must draw us at first almost against our will,—that He must send His law with its curses and threatenings to

* John vi. 39-44. † Phil. ii. 13. ‡ Gal. v. 17.

scourge us, to be our “Schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ;”*—“It is written in the Prophets,” continues our Lord, “and they shall be *all*” (God’s people) “taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me.”† None else, none else my brethren, among men: “Enter ye in at the strait gate,” can only be said effectually, to those who are chosen of God, redeemed by the Son, and regenerated by the Holy Ghost,—to those who are ‘born of God’ and ‘taught of God;’—they and they only can come to God.

And how shall they come? There are two ways spoken of in the text, though only one leads to God,—two ways, and two entrances, or two gates: a broad way, with a wide gate, and a narrow way with a strait gate; these will each in their turn occupy our attention.

But first I remark, that in the verse following the text, as well as in the whole chapter preceding, our Lord warned His hearers against those, who were directing them the wrong way. The Scribes and Pharisees were then the expounders of God’s Word,—the great teachers

* Gal. iii. 24.

† John vi. 45.

of that day : and they were perverters of the way of the Lord. So that our Lord told His disciples not to follow their example in anything, and He denounced woe against the Scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites. “ Take heed,” He says, “ that ye do not your alms before men,— as the hypocrites do in the Synagogues and in the streets ;” “ and when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are ; for they love to pray standing in the Synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men :” and “ when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance ; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.—Verily, I say unto you,” (in all these things) “ they have their reward.”* These false teachers misunderstood Divine Truth, and their conduct corresponded with their false views ; they were very zealous and very devoted, but their zeal was not according to knowledge. So that again in the words following the text, our Lord thinks it necessary to warn His disciples against them. “ Beware of false prophets,” (or teachers) “ which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening

* Matt. vi. 1, 2, 5, 16.

wolves; ye shall know them by their fruits." You may as well expect to "gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles," as expect to see the "fruits of the Spirit" from such a corrupt source. These works of theirs, of which they think so much, come not from the Spirit, but from the flesh; the fruit is evil, which only grows to be seen of men; "a good tree cannot bring forth such evil fruit," "wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."* As if our Lord had said 'Do not follow these false teachers, do not walk in the way they are walking, for it is the way of the flesh, the way of the world, (which always looks at the outside,) and the way of destruction,' "many there be, that go in thereat." "Many will say to me" (he continued) "in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you."† Now, He says, do not follow teachers of this description. "Enter *ye* in at the strait gate,"—"because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

* Matt. vii. 15-20.

† Matt. vii. 22, 23.

But first for the wide gate, which is easily found, and the broad way along which so many go to destruction. St. Paul describes this way very plainly in his Epistle to the Ephesians. It is the course of nature, the wide gate is the natural entrance into the world, and “trespasses and sins” thronq the passage. “And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein” (and this is the broad way) “ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the Spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.”* So that the way of the *world* (according to St. Paul) is the way of the *devil*: and the ‘men of the world,’ (*i.e.* *all mankind* in their natural state,) are ‘children of disobedience.’ I say all mankind, for not even those who are “born again of the Spirit,” not even “the children of God,” are free from the imputation. “Among whom also,” continues the Apostle “*we all* had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath even as others.”†

* Eph. ii. 1, 2.

† Eph. ii. 3.

The character then of those who walk along the broad way, is that "they fulfil the desires of the flesh, and of the mind." They either live in open wickedness, or in secret enmity to God,—for the "carnal mind is enmity against God."* As to those who "fulfil the lusts of the flesh," there can be no doubt where their way is tending. 'They that sow to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption.'† "Now the works of the flesh are manifest," (open to everyone's view) "which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which" adds the Apostle, "I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven."‡ No! Their road tends in the opposite direction: their works are manifest, and it is manifest also to whom they belong. "Ye are of your father the devil," said our Lord, "and the lusts of your father ye will do."§ So far as regards those who 'fulfil the lusts of the flesh,' that is, those, who without

* Rom. viii. 7. † Gal. vi. 8. ‡ Gal. v. 19-21. § John viii. 44.

any respect to God's law and commandments, do whatsoever their natural passions and evil inclinations incline them to do. But there is another description of persons, who walk along the broad way of destruction; 'those who fulfil the desires of the mind.' "The carnal mind"—the natural mind of man, his own free uncontrolled will,—“is enmity against God.” And this enmity is shown in many ways. Some openly deny Him, and say of Him who is 'King of kings and Lord of lords,' "we will not have this man to reign over us:"* but there are more *secret* enemies than avowed traitors: there are more who attempt to undermine His authority, than there are who openly dispute it. There are many doubtless who refuse to recognize the 'Son and heir of God,' as He is made known by His word and ministers, who will not hearken to the words of His servants the Apostles, and Prophets; but there are more who tamper with the meaning of the word, who try to make the words of God speak, not His meaning, but their own, 'who keep the word of promise to the ear, but break it to the hope.' This is a very frequent way of fulfilling the "lusts of the

* Luke xix. 14.

mind,"—that is, the natural mind of man being enmity against God, not being subject to the law of God, (as neither indeed can it be,) being of a contrary spirit, sets itself to work, not to oppose Him openly and manifestly, but to assume the form of godliness, while it denies its power, to receive the letter of the Gospel, but to contradict its spirit.

The record of God is plain to be read, and seen of all men; that "God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son,"* yet how few believe this in the plain and simple manner in which it is revealed. How many,—instead of receiving eternal life as a free gift,—must bring some money, or some price of their own, to purchase it. They are too proud to put themselves on a level with the dying thief, and the poor repentant Magdalene, they will not plead so guilty, but must go about, in some degree, to 'establish their own righteousness,' and will not submit themselves to the righteousness of God. As if He did not know what best became Him, and how best to magnify His law, and glorify His name in our salvation? Again, how many are there, who in words receive the

* 1 John v. 11.

doctrine of justification by faith only in a crucified Redeemer, but yet who are looking for life in themselves, and not 'in the Son,' who are too proud to be daily and hourly pensioners on the grace of God, who think that a bough can bear fruit of itself, and that there is no need for the sap to come up the stem of the vine and along the branches; "not holding the Head," as the Apostle says, "from which all the body" (the Church) "by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God."* There are many ways, if time would permit me to allude to them, in which men deny God, and dishonour Christ, by explaining in a different way from what God intended, "the record which He has given of His Son:" in which they show the enmity of their hearts, in thus "fulfilling" (as far as they can) "the desires of their minds." And these several ways all merge into one common broad way, which—unless God of His mercy, and in the day of His power arrest the passengers,—leadeth to destruction. Freewill, by which I mean the natural will of man, called in Scripture the

* Col. ii. 19.

“will of the flesh,” never yet led a man into the way of life: it has led him into a thousand different ways of attempting to “work out his own salvation,” but these are all opposite, and contrary to the way of God’s appointment. The *flesh*, (and that does not only mean the body of man, but the mind also,) the carnal mind, lusteth ever against the Spirit,—against the mind of the Holy Spirit of God. This then is the characteristic of those who walk in the broad way,—“they fulfil the desires of the flesh, and of the mind,”—“they are,” says St. Paul, “by nature the children of wrath,”* that is all men by nature are in this broad way of destruction, “all have sinned” and therefore deserved God’s wrath and displeasure. The Apostle does not exclude himself even. “For we ourselves also,” he says in another Epistle, “were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.”†—And where does this way lead to? “To destruction” says our Lord. “Cursed is every one,” (the law had said before,) “who continueth not in all things that are written in

* Eph. ii. 3.

+ Tit. iii. 3.

the book of the law to do them.”* A man must either do them himself,—fulfil all the precepts of the holy and just and good law of God,—or his surety must fulfil them for him; there is no other way of salvation, all other ways lead to destruction from the face of the Lord. To those who claim in any degree to have “worked out their own salvation” without God’s working in them and for them,—to have established their own righteousness, who lay claim to life eternal for what themselves have done, either alone or together with Christ, what says the Scriptures? ‘They shall be judged every man according to his works’—they shall have justice—“and the soul that sinneth” (and alas! what soul hath not sinned!) “it shall die.”† But for those who plead guilty, and apply for mercy to Him who is ‘made unto us of God, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,’‡ who are taught to pray ‘Enter not into judgement with thy servants O Lord,’§ who lay claim to nothing on the score of justice, but take all on the ground of grace, who believe on Him that “is the end of the law for righteousness to every

* Gal. iii. 10. † Ez. xviii. 4. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 30. § Ps. cxliii. 2.

one that believeth,"* who 'believe the record which God hath given of His Son,' we tell them on the authority of God's word, that 'there is now no condemnation for them' †—that 'they are passed from death unto life' ‡—that "God hath given unto them eternal life, and this life is in His Son."§ Their faith is a proof of it; the very plea of *guilty* is a proof that God hath touched their hearts, and brought them to repentance. "If ye believe not that I am He," said our Lord himself, "ye shall die in your sins," ||—in the sins against the law, which ye have committed, and by which ye shall be judged. But "whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God," ¶—his faith proves it. He is taken from the broad way that leadeth to destruction, and led into the narrow way that leadeth unto life. I told you at the outset, that the words "Enter ye in at the strait gate," did not imply that man in his fallen state has power in himself to turn from Satan unto God: that it was spoken to His disciples, who had received help from above: and here we find that a man must be "born of God," before he

* Rom. x. 4. † Rom. viii. 1. ‡ John v. 24. § 1 John v. 11.
 || John viii. 24. ¶ 1 John v. 1.

can pursue that narrow way. The life of faith can only be led by those who are born again, and this is the work of God: it requires *Almighty* power to accomplish it: it requires the same power to create man anew, that created him at first. It were as absurd to suppose that a being can be formed by his own power, and born into the world, as to imagine that a soul can be regenerated, and born of God, by any power but that of the Highest. And so our Lord taught us in his conversation with Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit," (two distinct and separate things,—the one the outward and visible sign, the other the inward and spiritual grace,) "he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." And how is a man born of the Spirit? Our Lord thus explains himself "The wind bloweth where *it* listeth,"—not where you like or I like,—"and thou canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit."* The Almighty power is exerted,—whether in the ruling of the winds, or in the spiritual operations on the soul of man,—not under the influence and will and inclination of

* John iii. 5. 8.

the creature, but according to God's own good will and pleasure. His people are brought into the narrow way—are born again “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”* It is clearly implied that a man has no more power to accomplish this in himself, or in any child of man, than he has to direct the wind from one quarter of heaven to another, to rule the wind, or govern the tempest! No, the work is the work of God, and therefore it is called in Scripture a new creation,—a resurrection,—and a new birth: there is no encouragement given to the pride of man, who thinks that he can by his own natural will accomplish whatever he pleases that is good, or whenever he pleases. A man cannot so please, except God give him the will: or accomplish anything, except God ‘work in him so to do.’ As our Article expresses it, a man “cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God: wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us,”—(going before and preparing our hearts,) “that

* John i. 13.

we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will ;”* and this is only saying what the inspired King of Israel had said before, that “the preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue” (in all spiritual matters) “is from the Lord.”† But it may be asked, as indeed it often is, would God tell man to repent, to believe, to turn unto Him, if man had not the power in himself to do these things ? But in the same way God commands us to keep His laws,—‘to love Him with all the heart, and all the mind, and all the soul, and all the strength, and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves,’‡ and yet there never has been born the man who could fulfil these commandments. No, as the Apostle says, “if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law,”§ —that is salvation should have been by man’s works instead of by God’s grace. But as we all know by our own experience, as well as by the experience of all who have gone before us, no man can claim life from his fulfilment of the law ; “by grace are we saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God ;

* Art. x. + Prov. xvi. 1. † Luke x. 27. § Gal. iii. 21.

not of works lest any man should boast ;” * “the Scripture,” as the Apostle says, “hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” † The law is not for our salvation, but for our conviction and condemnation, — ‘though ordained for life,’ says St. Paul, ‘I found the commandment to be unto death.’ ‡ It acts as our “schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” § And thus when sinners are exhorted in Scripture to repent,—to believe,—to cleanse their hands,—to purify their hearts,—nay “to make themselves new hearts,” || it is no proof of themselves possessing the power to do so, but the commandment is given to them, that feeling it to be their duty, and at the same time feeling their inability, they may pray to Him that is mighty to save for grace to help them,—a prayer that is never made in vain,—a prayer that is heard, and answered by Him who convinced them of sin, and taught them to call upon Him in the day of trouble. O yes, my brethren, “Enter ye in at the strait gate :”

* Eph. ii. 8, 9. † Gal. iii. 22. ‡ Rom. vii. 10.
 § Gal. iii. 24. || Ez. xviii. 31.

God will enable all His people to find the narrow way,—all who believe His Word, and put their trust and confidence in Him, although “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” Few in any one place, and at any one time, although we know (thank God!) that there will be an innumerable number at the last, and those brought out of every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people on the face of the earth, that are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.* But look at the Church of God at any given period, and it is indeed but a ‘little flock,’—“a remnant” (as it is said) “according to the election of grace.”† Why at this very moment, by far the greater number of the inhabitants of the earth, so far from being even professing Christians, are (as the Apostle says of those who worship false gods) “worshippers of devils,”‡ and by far the greater part of professing Christendom, are partakers of that fearful and predicted apostacy, which in the place of Christ are worshippers and followers of Antichrist; and then again, if we look in any Protestant country, (take our own for instance) how many, what

* Cf. Rev. v. 9-11. † Rom. xi. 5. ‡ See 1 Cor. x. 20.

multitudes are there who are utterly reckless, and willingly ignorant of 'things pertaining to salvation:' and lastly of those who seek salvation, how large a proportion seek it in their own way, or in the way of some human idol, instead of in the only and true way of God's appointing, and who thus seeking, shall never find it. O! well may it be said, in contrasting the strait gate and narrow way of life, with the wide gate and broad way of destruction, while in the latter case, that "many there be which go in thereat," in the former "few there be that find it." None but those of God's drawing,—of the Holy Spirit's guidance,—none but those who are 'taught of God,' and have 'learned of the Father.' But what says our Lord of them? "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all *taught of God*. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."*—And again, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."† And why come they to Christ? Let St. Peter answer for them, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are

* John vi. 45.

† John vi. 37.

sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”* Therefore they come unto him, because they know that He is both the gate and the way to life eternal. “Then said Jesus unto them” (unto His disciples) “I am the door of the sheep :” “by me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved :” “he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up” (or attempts to climb) “some other way, the same is a thief and a robber :”† he shall never enter in, he shall be cast out—into outer darkness. Christ is the strait gate, as He is the only way, whereby lost sinners may come to God and be saved. “I am,” Himself said, “the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”‡ ‘No man cometh unto the Father, and unto life eternal, but by Jesus,’—and “no man can come to me,” says our Lord himself, “except it were given him of my Father;”§ these are two truths, which are as high as heaven, and as fast and as lasting as eternity. You cannot unfix them, you cannot overturn them, for they are the words of the God of heaven and earth.

* John vi. 68, 69. † John x. 7, 9, 1. ‡ John xiv. 6.
§ John vi. 65.

Every man therefore that enters that "narrow way that leadeth unto life," must be brought (in the day of God's power) to deny himself: he must renounce the desires of the flesh, and of the mind, which belong to "the broad way that leadeth to destruction;" he must renounce his natural pride of heart; he must renounce his self-righteousness; he must renounce his mistaken notions of reconciling himself to God, (or as it is often expressed) of making his peace with God. All these things only keep us at a distance. He must come to Jesus (whoever is taught of God, and drawn by the Spirit,) just as he is, a poor lost sinner, and cast himself on His merits and His mercy: and O! if he does this by a true and living faith, it will be a faith that operates on his heart and life and conscience, a faith, that worketh by love, that purifieth the heart, that overcometh the world, a faith that teaches us "to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."* All these things mark the way of life! My brethren are we walking in it? Have we entered the strait gate? and O, if we have obtained "a good hope through

* Titus ii. 12.

grace,"* what cause for gratitude and thankfulness! That God should have fixed his love upon us, "when we were dead in trespasses and sins,"† that He should use such language as this, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee,"‡ that He should have given us to His Son to redeem, and to His Spirit to regenerate, and that He should have led us into a way so plain, that as the Prophet says, "wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein,"§—what cause for gratitude and joy! And then His promises for the future: although our strength is weakness, our wisdom folly, although we are transgressors from the womb, and deal very treacherously, yet, (asks the Apostle,) "Shall our unbelief make the word of God of none effect?"|| No, "faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it:"¶ He will not suspend His glory on so brittle a thread as man's performances. What He hath purposed, that will He accomplish. And to what has He called His people? To life,—'eternal life, which is in His Son.' Life in the favour of God, in the enjoy-

* 2 Thess. ii. 16.

† Eph. ii. 1.

‡ Jer. xxxi. 3.

§ Isaiah xxxv. 8.

|| Rom. iii. 3.

¶ 2 Thess. v. 24.

ment of God, and in the end, entire conformity to God. They are called “to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ,”*—and “He that hath begun a good work in them,” St. Paul was confident, “would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”† “They are kept,” says St. Peter, “by the power of God, through faith,—unto salvation.”‡

O may God, of His mercy, bless His word to our hearts, and build us up in our most holy faith! May He help us in all times of temptation, and distress, to depend upon this,—that His mercy, His love, is like Himself, and knows no ebb, nor change, nor alteration,—“The same yesterday, to-day, and for ever!”§ “Having loved His own” (it is sweetly written of our Lord) “which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.”|| If He has given us any token of His love, He has given us a pledge of everlasting love,—love that shall last to all eternity.

* 2 Thess. ii. 14. + Phil. i. 6. † 1 Peter i. 5.

§ Heb. xiii. 8. || John xiii. 1.

SERMON V.

ST. JOHN xiv. 16, 17.

“ And 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 ; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him : but ye know him ; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”

WHAT a mystery is the Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the Godhead ! Here, in the words of the text, is mention made of the whole glorious Three-in-One ; I, the Father, and another Comforter. “ I will pray the *Father*, and He

shall give you another *Comforter*." All Three are mentioned in one short sentence, but O how much is in that sentence! I call the doctrine of the Trinity a mystery, and in thus calling it I only use a Scriptural expression: the 'deep things of God,'* you will find, are said to be mysteries, in holy Writ. "The mystery of Christ,"† St. Paul speaks of, and "the mystery of His will:"‡ He 'makes known the mystery of the Gospel:'§ He 'holds the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience;'|| and declares that "great is the mystery of godliness."¶ Now a mystery, is 'a thing kept secret, and hid from our understanding, till it be revealed to us;' that is one meaning of the word: St. Paul employs it in this sense in 1 Cor. ii. 7, "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew;" (they knew nothing of God's hidden wisdom, of His great mystery,) "for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Christ was 'delivered up by the determinate counsel

* 1 Cor. ii. 10, 7. † Eph. iii. 4. ‡ Eph. i. 9. § Eph. vi. 19.

|| 1 Tim. iii. 9.

¶ 1 Tim. iii. 16.

and foreknowledge of God :’ but it was not the less ‘with wicked hands that they crucified and slew Him,’* they knew nothing, and cared nothing, for God’s purpose, and counsel, but followed their own wicked wills ; ‘for envy they delivered him’ to death, (as Pilate knew of the Jews) and so, ‘His blood is upon them, and their children.’† Had they known the hidden wisdom of God ; had they known the trouble that would have come upon themselves, they ‘would not have crucified the Lord of glory :’ but it was ‘hidden from their eyes,’ and so, following their own corrupt inclinations, they fulfilled the will and purpose of God, which ‘He had ordained before the world.’ Now, there is but one way of becoming acquainted with the mysteries of God ; and that is when God reveals them unto us, by His Spirit : “as it is written, ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him,’” ‡ the ‘deep things of God,’ but God hath revealed them unto us, by His Spirit, unto us, Christian believers, unto us, who are “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh,

* Acts ii. 23. † Matt. xxvii. 18, 25. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

nor of the will of man, but of God.”* “Unto you, it is given” (said our Lord) “to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God:”† but to others it is not given,—*i.e.* to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own conceits, who will not become fools (in the eyes of the world) that they may be wise, and sit at the feet of Jesus as little children to be taught of Him, ‘that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.’ Another meaning of the word mystery is when the matter, revealed to us, is beyond the grasp of our understanding; such as this doctrine of the Trinity, and that of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, ‘God and man in One Christ:’ we are assured of the reality, of the certainty, of these truths; but we cannot comprehend with our limited minds, the manner, and mode, how they are. “Behold I show you a mystery;” says St. Paul “we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,” (we that are alive that is, and remain unto the coming of the Lord) “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall

* John i. 13.

† Luke viii. 10.

be changed.”* There is no greater mystery than this, that a poor dying mortal should put on immortality, a poor decaying wretch be raised again incorruptible. King Agrippa thought it “a thing incredible;”† the Athenians laughed in mockery when they heard of “the resurrection of the dead;”‡ but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit: we may not be able to explain the process, by which a natural body shall be changed into a spiritual, (‘our vile body changed like unto Christ’s glorious body,’§) but we will not be debarred from “comforting one another with these words.”|| There are many things in nature which we know to be true, but which do not admit of explanation by our present means of knowledge: we know not why many of the laws of nature (as we call them,) were imposed by the Creator, but we receive them as ultimate facts from which there is no escape, but beyond which we cannot reach. And so the mysteries of religion; doctrines revealed to faith, but not to be comprehended by our natural faculties, are the ultimate facts of religion: beyond them our reasoning powers

* 1 Cor. xv. 51. † Acts. xxvi. 8. ‡ Acts xvi. 18.

§ Phil. iii. 21. || 1 Thess. iv. 18.

fail, but we are not to be the less thankful that God has given us to know these mysteries; and although we know in part only, yet “when that which is perfect is come,” (the perfect day—when we see ‘face to face,’) “then shall we know, even as also we are known.”* “It doth not yet appear,” (says St. John,) “what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”† Therefore “we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ,” (from heaven:) “who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”‡ And just as we believe this ‘great mystery concerning Christ and His Church,’§ that at the coming of the Bridegroom, the Bride hath made herself ready, and put on glorious apparel, so do we firmly believe other mysteries that are revealed to us concerning the nature and attributes of God, although, like the prospect of eternity, they are far away beyond the grasp of our finite faculties. “Secret things” we are taught “be-

* 1 Cor. xiii. 10, 12.

† 1 John iii. 2.

‡ Phil. iii. 20, 21.

§ Eph. v. 32.

long unto the Lord our God," and we do not attempt to pry 'into that beyond the veil,' "but those things which are revealed, belong unto us, and unto our children for ever."*

It is expressly revealed to us that 'the Son of Man,' (as our blessed Lord called Himself on earth,) was also 'the Son of God;' and in that twofold nature as God and man in one Christ, constituted 'the great mystery of Godliness,' (as it is said in Scripture) "God manifest in the flesh."† 'A great mystery,' this, my brethren, and one on the reception of which, depends all our hopes of salvation. "If ye believe not that I am He," (the Sent-One of the Father, the ransom and the righteousness of God,) "ye shall die in your sins:"‡ your sins shall be on your own shoulders, and ye shall be judged every man, and rewarded every man, according to his works. Now to be "rewarded according to our works," is in Scripture language a very common expression for the punishment of sins, for condemnation. I give you an instance. "Alexander the coppersmith" (says St. Paul) "did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:"§ I give you another,

* Deut. xxix. 29. † 1 Tim. iii. 16. ‡ John viii. 24. § 2 Tim. iv. 14.

“If the word spoken by angels was steadfast,” (*i.e.*, “the law by the disposition of angels”*) “and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation.”† And generally you will find, if not universally, the expression bears this meaning. To be “judged according to your works,” or “to be rewarded according to your works,” is only another expression for condemnation. Every man born into this world, is either “saved by grace,” or “judged according to his works.” “By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.”‡ Again, “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began;”§ and yet once more, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being

* Acts vii. 53. † Heb. ii. 2, 3. ‡ Eph. ii. 8, 9. § 2 Tim. i. 9.

justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”* So that you see, to be saved by grace, and to be saved “in a judgment according to works,” are altogether different and distinct things: in one case it is a free act of favour and mercy on the part of a gracious Sovereign, (so far as we are concerned,) towards the poor guilty wretch at His footstool, “the broken and the contrite heart whom God will not despise:”† in the other it is a plea of justification put in and substantiated: which (if St. Paul’s words be true,) never has been, and never shall be done: “by the deeds of the law then shall no flesh be justified in His sight:”‡ and so the Psalmist prays again “Enter not into judgement with Thy servant, O Lord, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified.”§ They are altogether different pleas set up by guilty sinners, you cannot combine them, you cannot mingle, or mix, or interweave them. If salvation be “by grace,” (as St. Paul argues,) “then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace;

* Tit. iii. 5-7. + Psalm li. 17. † Rom. iii. 20.
§ Psalm cxliii. 2.

otherwise work is no more work.”* For “to him that worketh” (who looks for salvation for anything that he has done) “is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt” (as justly due to him). “But to him that worketh not,” (who in himself has not one atom of claim) “but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly,” (looking altogether out of himself, and putting ‘his whole trust and confidence in God’s mercy for Christ’s sake,’) “his faith is counted for righteousness.”† He lays hold of the ransom and the righteousness God has provided, “the lamb slain,” who is “made unto him of God, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”‡ “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved:”§ but “if ye believe not that I am He,” (as Himself said,) “ye shall die in your sins,”|| in your transgressions against the law, by which ye shall be judged, and for which ye shall receive a just recompense of reward before the great white throne of judgment.

The means by which the salvation of God’s people was wrought out, (as you all know) was

* Rom. xi. 6. † Rom. iv. 4, 5. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 30.
§ Acts xvi. 31. || John viii. 24.

this: "He that knew no sin was made sin for us," (bore our sins in His own body on the tree,) "that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."* Christ made our sin, we made His righteousness, or in other words our guilt imputed to Him, His righteousness imputed to us.—"That being justified by His grace" (but in no respect by our own works) "we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."† Thus (as I before quoted) "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us," (according to the grace of God) "by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour."‡

I think the way is now plain before us for the understanding of the words of the text. The passage I have just read to you is intimately connected with the same subject: for you find from it, that salvation is the joint-work, *not* of God and man, as some would teach you, but of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, that while it is by the mercy or grace of the Father that we are saved, "for His great

* 2 Cor. v. 21. † Titus iii. 7. ‡ Titus iii. 5, 6.

love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins,"* (saving us in Christ,) it is no less by the active and passive obedience of the Son, by what He did, and by what He suffered for our sakes, by His "blood and righteousness" and by the regenerating and renewing of the Holy Ghost.

The words of the text were spoken at a very critical time: great events were just about to happen, and the hearts of the followers of Jesus were troubled. They might well be so, for He forewarned them in this last conversation that "the world would hate them," the world's eye would be evil towards them, because God was good,—filled with envy, hatred and malice, and why? "because they were not of the world, but He had chosen them out of the world, therefore the world would hate them."† He told them that they would be "put out of the synagogues:"‡ that the great religious professors (the Scribes and the Pharisees) of the several ages as they rolled, would "separate them from their company and cast out their name as evil,"§ "yea, the time cometh," (added our

* Ephes. ii. 4.

+ John xv. 19.

† John xvi. 2.

§ Luke vi. 22.

Lord,) “when whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.”* The opposition of the world to the truth of God is quite compatible with the notion that they are “doing God service,” that they are verily doing, (while persecuting Jesus of Nazareth as Paul said,) what they ought to do.† “The God of this world,” (*i.e.*, the devil,) “hath so blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, should shine unto them.”‡ You will generally find the greatest opposition to “the truth as it is in Jesus,”§ from “the false apostles and deceitful workers”|| of “another gospel which is not another;”¶—from ministers and members of false Christs and false doctrines, which are set up and believed in instead of the true. And thus is that hard saying proved just, that “the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before the Scribes and the Pharisees:”** it is far more likely that they should recognize their true position, and receive salvation on the only terms on which it is ever granted to any,

* John xvi. 2. † Acts xxvi. 9. ‡ 2 Cor. iv. 4. § Eph. iv. 21.

|| 2 Cor. xi. 13. ¶ Gal. i. 6, 7. ** Matt. xxi. 31.

namely, as poor pensioners on the throne of grace.

It is not surprising, that when our Lord forewarned His disciples of the troubles that would come upon them, and of the dangers that surrounded them, especially when He added that He Himself was about to leave them, to leave them “as lambs among wolves;”* it was not surprising (I say) independently of the thoughts of losing their Lord and master,—their guide and comforter amid all difficulties, their own familiar friend, (if I might use the expression,) with Whom they took sweet counsel together, that “sorrow should fill their hearts.” “Nevertheless” (said our Lord) “I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.”† This Comforter, as our text tells us, is the spirit of truth, the Holy Ghost, “whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him.” The world only receives that which is palpable to the senses, it can have no idea of any influence except that which it receives through them. The world is sharp-sighted and

* Luke x. 3.

† John xvi. 7.

ready-witted, very wise in its generation, but “there are more things in heaven and earth than its philosophy ever dreamed of.” It will believe its own eyes, and its own ears, but certainly in its natural state, more especially as directed by the god of this world, will have ‘no ear to hear’ or ‘heart to understand’ the deep things of God—which God reveals to His children by His Spirit. The world will walk by sight, but not by faith, by that faith “which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”* “Whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him.”† The world would not receive our Lord, whom it could see; “who came and dwelt among us.”—“He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.”‡ Only those who were “born of God.” If then men would not receive the Son whom they had seen, how can they receive the Holy Ghost the Comforter, whom they have not seen? “The world cannot receive Him, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him.” “The things of

* Heb. xi. 1. † John xiv. 17. ‡ John i. 14, 10, 11.

God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God," and those to whom He is pleased to "reveal them;" "but the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto Him: neither can He know them, because they are spiritually discerned,"* only to be discerned by the enlightening and enlivening of the Spirit. The natural man means a man as he is born into this world, with none but natural advantages, no supernatural or spiritual work on his soul; it does not mean man, as he came out of the hands of his Maker, "very good," with a ready ear for the word of God, and a ready eye to follow His directing finger, and a ready hand to execute His behests: but man as he has made himself, by listening to the voice of the tempter, and not hearkening to the law of the Lord. In this state, since "sin entered into the world, and death by sin,"† man is taken captive by the devil at his will. Satan is his prime instigator and energizer, as St. Paul says; "He walks according to the course of this world," (of which the devil is the God,) "according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of

* 1 Cor. ii. 11, 14.

† Rom. v. 12.

disobedience:" he is "a child of wrath," an "alien from the commonwealth" of God's chosen, and "a stranger from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." This is the natural state of man, of every man born into this world, as he is naturally constituted. The only exceptions to this general rule, are those which God makes, those whom "God who is rich in mercy," "hath quickened"* by His Spirit, and thus dispossessed of the power of Satan: those whom He hath brought 'from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto Himself.'† These are under another energizer, another than the evil spirit "works in them both to will and to do,"‡ "even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world" (the devil's dominion) "cannot receive." He is the energizer of the children of God, their guide and leader into all truth, their comforter, ("another comforter,") their abider and indweller for ever, so that of them it is said, and said truly, "greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world:"§ the Holy Spirit is greater than the evil spirit, far greater, as shall

* Eph. ii. 2, 3, 12, 4, 5.

† Acts xxvi. 18.

‡ Phil. ii. 13.

§ 1 John iv. 4.

one day be proved, nay as it is every day proved by those who enjoy His holy communion.

“I will pray the Father,” (said our Lord,) “and He shall give you another Comforter:” another (that is) in His place. Jesus Christ was a Comforter to His disciples, He comforted them by His presence, by His conversation, by His example: He comforted them by His Divine counsel, “in all time of their tribulation;” He comforted them, (O how did He comfort them!) by “His exceeding great and precious promises.”* Think how He comforted Mary and Martha at the grave of Lazarus. “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection,” (was the reply,) “at the last day. Jesus said unto her,” and proved to her by his wondrous miracle the truth of His saying, “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? Yea, Lord; I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.”

* 2 Peter i. 4.

“And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes : and his face was bound about with a napkin,” (he that had been four days dead) and “Jesus saith unto them, loose him, and let him go.”* It may be well said then, (to take one instance among numbers numberless,) that our blessed Lord was during His lifetime on earth “a Comforter:” but from the necessity of the case, His death and resurrection, and ascension to God’s right hand, it could only be for a time that He was so. So that we may see at once, if we search no further, that it might be expedient, (bitter as was the pain of parting,) ‘expedient for His disciples that Jesus should go away, that the Comforter might come to them.’† “Another Comforter;” equally powerful, of the same mind, the same “great love;” one in counsel, will, and act, “another Comforter, that He might abide with them,” or dwell in them (as we shall presently see) “for ever.”

“I will pray the Father:” O what a mercy to be interested in the prayers of Jesus Christ ! All persons are not interested in them, not the world that lieth in wickedness: the world, whose

* John xi. 21, 23-27, 44.

† John xvi. 7.

God is the Devil, but those whom the Father hath given Him out of the world, and who have ‘received the words which He brought, and have believed that God did send Him.’ “I pray for them:” said our Lord, “and for them also which shall believe on me through their word;—I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine.”* Christ Jesus came to do His Father’s will, and He knew that will to be, that ‘the world should be judged and condemned, and given up to the devouring flame,’ not at His first coming, but at His second, when He shall judge the world, and condemn the world, in righteousness: but He also knew it to be His Father’s will, that He should save a world within a world, (so to speak,) to rescue a world of believers from a world without God, lying in the wicked one. For these He prayed, as for them He suffered and wrought righteousness. O what a blessing then, I say, to be interested in the prayers of Jesus Christ! “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.”† What a blessing to know that

* John xvii. 8, 9, 20.

† Luke xxii. 31, 32.

we have a great "high-priest," not one "which cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but one who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."* One therefore who "is able to succour them that are tempted."† One who is not ignorant of Satan's devices, but who can foresee and ward off his fiery darts, "who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it:"‡ an inestimable blessing this, my brethren. "Let not your hearts be troubled:" (said our Lord) "ye believe in God," that He is your Father, "believe also in me,"§ that "I and my Father are one.||" This is the only way for you to get peace and comfort. "In my Father's house," my Father's and your Father's—"are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."¶ O here is consolation in trouble! "They have taken away my Lord," (as Mary said in her sorrow) "and we know not where they have laid him."** Gone! O! if she could have remembered this saying, "gone to prepare a place

* Heb. iv. 15. † Heb. ii. 18. ‡ 1 Cor. x. 13. § John xiv. 1.

|| John x. 30. ¶ John xiv. 2. ** John xx. 13.

for you :” “and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again,” (O rich comfort and consolation!) “and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.” Meantime, till I come again,—again to make your enemies your footstool, again ‘in glorious majesty,’ again ‘to bruise Satan under your feet,’—“I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter :” * another to supply my place : another in person that is, not in mind, nor in essence, the same in mind, the same in power, the same in love, “the Spirit of Christ” † as He is called—one with the Father and the Son, “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” ‡ Christ Jesus is “God manifest in the flesh :” § the Holy Ghost is God manifest in the spirit, but as “a Spirit hath not flesh and bones,” || is not palpable to the outward senses : He, the Holy Spirit, manifests Himself by His fruits, by His operations, by His effects ; the only way in which He can be manifested to mortal man. And what are the effects He produces ? At the 26th verse we are told, “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he

* John xiv. 3, 16. † 1 Peter i. 11. ‡ Heb. xiii. 8.

§ 1 Tim. iii. 16.

|| Luke xxiv. 39.

shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you.” “He shall testify of me:”* “He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.”† The Spirit glorifies the Son by making known ‘the truth as it is in Jesus,’‡ so that in the matter of our salvation, the Spirit’s work is as needful and as necessary as that of the Father, and that of the Son. Many people’s religion comprehends only what Christ has done for us, they make no account of what the Spirit does in us: and yet without this, without His working in us both to will and to do, we should never know aught of God, nor ever worship Him in spirit or in truth. You would think, to hear some people talk, that they had “not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost,”§ for that which He alone can accomplish,—repentance, and faith, and love towards God, they attribute to the good will and power of their own hearts and mind. My brethren, Jesus Christ did not treat the Holy Spirit thus disrespectfully. Very fearful words were spoken by Him of those who should slight His authority. “Whosoever speaketh a word

* John xv. 26. † John xvi. 14. ‡ Eph. iv. 21. § Acts xix. 2.

against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him : but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.”* This, in which we live, is the dispensation of God’s grace by the Holy Spirit, “the ministration of the Spirit”† as it is called, and when its days are numbered, and its time is completed, then “shall the mystery of God be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets.”‡ “The accepted time, the day of salvation,”§ will be passed: “There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”|| “With a mighty hand, and a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out,”¶ will God deal with the unrepentant and the unbelieving. “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched forth my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a

* Matt. xii. 32. + 2 Cor. iii. 8. † Rev. x. 7. § 2 Cor. vi. 2.

|| Heb. x. 26, 27.

¶ Ezekiel xx. 33.

whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you.”* Fearful words indeed, my brethren, to them that “know not God,” (“doing despite unto the Spirit of grace,”†) “and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:” (who “receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved,”‡) “who shall be punished” (we are told) “with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.”§

Turn we from this painful subject to the glorious promise of the text made to the children of God, after our Lord’s ascension, and therefore belonging to all the “members of Christ” in this present dispensation. “He,” the Spirit of truth, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, “shall abide with you,” or dwell in you, take up His abode in you, “for ever: whom the world” (the world at large) “cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him, but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” He was not in them then, that is, previous to our Lord’s ascension. “The Holy Ghost was not yet given,” (we are told) “because that Jesus was not yet glorified,”||

* Prov. i. 24-27. † Heb. x. 29. ‡ 2 Thess. ii. 10.

§ 2 Thess. i. 8, 9. || John vii. 39.

not till Jesus went away, did He send Him to supply His place as 'an 'indweller' and a Comforter. He was "with them" in thought, and word, and deed. That is, He was with them influentially, He brought them to repentance (convincing them of sin): He gave them faith: by His power they wrought miracles; 'Even the devils were subject unto them;'* but not till Jesus had been "raised up," "and by the right hand of God exalted, did He receive of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost,"† of His personal presence with His people, and send Him forth. He—Christ Jesus at His resurrection and ascension, was then made a quickening Spirit, and His people on earth were "baptized with the Holy Ghost,"‡ made partakers of a 'new and divine nature,' the "incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth for ever."§ The Holy Ghost had begun then (as He does now) by influencing, and ended (as he ends now) by indwelling. Wherever "He hath begun a good work, we are confident of this very thing, that He will perform it," (finish or complete it,) "until the day of Jesus Christ;"||

* Luke x. 17. † Acts ii. 32, 33. ‡ Acts i. 5.

§ 1 Peter i. 23.

|| Phil. i. 6.

until the great day of the Lord, “when the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”* For even this last great change is the work of the Spirit that dwelleth in us ! For “if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.”† “Dwelleth in you,” or “abideth with you,” *i.e.*, ‘takes up His abode in you for ever.’ Not only in this life, not only are the children of God here, “after that they believe, sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise,” (or ‘that holy promised Spirit’) “which is the earnest of their inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory,”‡ not only now, does “the Spirit witness with their spirits that they are the children of God : and if children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ,”§ not only “because they are now sons, hath God ’sent forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father :”|| not only, “is the love of God”

* 1 Cor. xv. 52. + Rom. viii. 11. † Ephes. i. 13, 14.
 § Rom. viii. 16, 17. || Gal. iv. 6.

(“His great love wherewith He loved us”*) “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us,”† kindling our love to Him who first loved us, and who has told us if we love Him, “to love one another,”‡ not only so, but it is promised that this Holy Spirit shall “dwell” in us, “shall abide with us for ever,” not only in this world, but in that which is to come. He will be the sustainer of God’s redeemed people, even in their glorified state, for even then they will not be able to keep themselves: only their “being bound up in the same bundle of life”§ with their living Head “from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God,”|| only this can keep them. The angels fell from their “first estate,”¶ and so might men from their last and more glorious one, were they not (like the “elect angels”**) sustained by Him who chose them. From first to last then, my brethren, give the glory of your salvation, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you, (for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ—he is none of

* Ephes. ii. 4. † Rom. v. 5. ‡ 1 John iv. 11. § 1 Sam. xxv. 29.

|| Col. ii. 19. ¶ Jude 6. ** 1 Tim. v. 21.

His) to whom alone the glory is due, to the glorious Trinity in Unity. "Ye know Him," says the text. Is this true? Have you experienced His influence on your hearts and minds? Has He convinced you of sin? has he shown you the Saviour of sinners? taken of the things of Christ and shown them unto you? made you receive "the truth as it is in Jesus" in the love of it? O be very thankful, if this is the case! But further, have you experienced His indwelling power? Has He "borne witness with your spirits that you are the children of God,"* with all the glorious blessings that belong to that endearing appellation? Have you been sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise,—the earnest of your heritage? O be doubly thankful to God "for this His unspeakable gift!"† Thank Him for all that is past, and trust Him for all that is to come. "What?" (well might the Apostle exclaim under such circumstances), "know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost,"—think what an honour! only think how the faculties of our souls should be consecrated to the service of God!—"the temple of the Holy Ghost which is

* Rom. viii. 16.

† 2 Cor. ix. 15.

in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" Why? "For ye are bought with a price:" at the price of Christ's most precious blood, at the price of God's dear Son, whom He spared not; "therefore" (I conclude with the Apostle's exhortation) "glorify God in your body, and in your Spirit, which are God's."*

* 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

SERMON VI.

JAMES i. 12.

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”

“WE love God,” my brethren, (if we have any love to Him at all,) “because He first loved us.”* The Apostle speaks of the “great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins.”† How could that be? How could a Holy God love guilty sinners? Only by seeing them in the Sinless, seeing them in Christ, His only begotten and well beloved Son.

* 1 John iv. 19.

† Eph. ii. 4. 5.

And this love of His (he tells us further,) is “shed abroad in our hearts,” in the hearts of His people, “by the Holy Ghost that is given to us :” * kindling our love to Him in return : His grace winning our gratitude. Well then ! our text informs us that “the Lord hath promised the crown of life to them that love Him ;” not *because* they love Him, for we have just seen that their love to Him springs from His love to them. “Not that we loved God ” (says St. John) “but that He loved us.” † “The love of Christ constraineth us,” ‡ as the Apostle says. His love to us draws out our affection to Him : we can do no other than love and obey one who has given us, and who continues to give us, such costly proofs of His great love to us. And “because ye are sons,” (we read again,) already sons by adoption and grace, (God having fixed His sovereign love upon you, and chosen you to be His sons and heirs in Christ Jesus,) “because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father :” § enabling you to realize your relationship to Him in the Son of His love : drawing out your affections to Him, and

* Rom. v. 5. † 1 John iv. 10. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 14. § Gal. iv. 6.

thus showing to you, and showing to all, that you are being made meet for the inheritance, and are living “in hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began.”* The turning point (you observe therefore,) in salvation, is in God, and not in man. The things pertaining to salvation, the broken and contrite heart, the love of truth, the abiding of the Spirit, the walk with God, all these, are said to be “things freely given to us of God.”† With regard to our justification before God, it is said, we are “justified freely by His grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus:”‡ and with regard to our sanctification, you remember the Apostle’s prayer, “and the very God of peace sanctify you wholly.”§ God sanctifies His people, by His Spirit, just as He justifies them by His Son, “who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”|| From first to last we are indebted for our salvation to the sovereign love and free grace of God, which is given us in Christ Jesus our Lord. “He is made unto us of God, wisdom and

* Titus i. 2. † 1 Cor. ii. 12. ‡ Rom. iii. 24.

§ 1 Thess. v. 23. || Rom. iv. 25.

righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:”*—all that is necessary for our complete salvation. After He had borne the cross, He wore the crown: and the “crown of life” He shares with His people. “Thou hast given Him power over all flesh,” (He thus addressed His heavenly Father,) “that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him:”†—to all who are manifested to be “members of Christ and Children of God” and therefore in His right and title, “inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.”

Now in the words of our text, “the crown of life” is said to be the end of a life of trial to the children of God. “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried,”—*i.e.*, when his trial is over,—“he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.”

“Blessed is the man:” we meet with these words very often in Scripture; “Blessed is the man,” (writes St. Paul quoting from the Psalmist,) “to whom the Lord will not impute sin.”‡ “Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God im-

* 1 Cor. i. 30. † John xvii. 2. ‡ Rom. iv. 8.

puteth righteousness without works.”* There is no blessedness in going about to establish our own righteousness, for it is all labour in vain, it were as easy for the “Ethiopian to change his skin or the leopard his spots;” if this could be done, (says the prophet,) “then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.”† There is no such thing as “inherent righteousness” in any of the race of sinful man. “Righteousness without works,” *i.e.*, “the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe,”‡—the perfect fulfilment of the law on the part of our Surety and Saviour, this only will justify an ungodly sinner in the sight of God: God will not impute sin to such an one,—for He has already imputed it to his Saviour and Surety. He “bare our sins in His own body on the tree,”§ and in the same manner is His righteousness imputed to the believer. “He that knew no sin, was made sin for us: that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”|| Christ made our sin, we made His righteousness.

The people of God are described as *blessed*

* Rom. iv. 6. † Jer. xiii. 23. ‡ Rom. iii. 22.
 § 1 Peter ii. 24. || 2 Cor. v. 21.

in many other ways, fixing on some point or other of their character or conduct, by which they may be known among men, or in which they differ from others. Thus in the sermon on the mount our Lord thus describes those who are the "salt of the earth," and "the light of the world;" "Blessed are the poor in spirit," that is one of their marks or characteristics; "Blessed are they that mourn," while the world rejoiceth: "Blessed are the meek;" "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness;" "Blessed are the pure:" "Blessed are the peacemakers." These expressions are all descriptive of Christ's disciples according to their conduct and conversation, their spirit, or demeanour, under different circumstances. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake:" "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake."* What can be more descriptive than this of the trials of the true Church of God? "The world that lieth in wickedness,"† must of course to the end of time, hate the Church of the living God that witnesseth

* Cf. Matt. v. 3-14.

† 1 John v. 19.

against it. "But great is their reward," (the Church's reward,) "in heaven." They shall receive "the reward of the inheritance;"* "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away," (very different from all worldly possessions,) "reserved," (says St. Peter) "for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time."† And this reminds us of another instance of blessedness mentioned in the word of God; "Blessed is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power:"‡ *i.e.*, in the "resurrection of the just," of which our Lord speaks, and not in the resurrection "of the rest of the dead," the unjust. Blessed is he that is saved by grace and not left to the judgment, and alas! the condemnation according to works. Blessed is he, that can say in faith with the Apostle, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day;" a free gift, (mind you,) in the great day of the Lord: "and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."§ "Blessed are

* Col. iii. 24. † 1 Peter i. 4, 5. ‡ Rev. xx. 6. § 2 Tim. iv. 8.

the dead that die in the Lord :”* and blessed are they who “live unto the Lord ;”† and who shall live until they be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and come with Him to “judge the world in righteousness.”‡

But it is time we applied our thoughts to the particular, and somewhat remarkable, instance of blessedness, contained in the words of the text: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation :” *i.e.*, the Christian man, the believing man. He is blessed if he can patiently “endure” (as one of old) “as seeing Him that is invisible.”§ He is blessed if he can live by faith and not by sight, for “when he is tried,”—(when his trials are over)—“he shall receive the crown of life.” We shall first have to consider the word “temptation,” in its various meanings; and in the second place, see that it is a part of God’s predestined plan for His people’s ultimate welfare: and therefore that those who endure it according to His will, may well be said to be “blessed.”

First then, for the different meanings of the word “temptation” in Scripture. We read of two kinds of “temptation.” Of one kind we

* Rev. xiv. 13. + Rom. xiv. 8. ‡ Psalm xcvi. 13.

‡ See 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17. § Heb. xi. 27.

have an instance in Genesis xxii. 1. "And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham." And how does God tempt any man? The Apostle tells us how He does not tempt any man in the verse following the text, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man."* That is, just as it is impossible for God to be tempted with evil, just so impossible is it that He should tempt any man with evil: it cannot be that God would seduce any man, or allure him, or draw him aside from that which is right. This were altogether impossible, and incompatible with the righteous character of God. What then means the text that I have quoted, and which says that "it came to pass that God did tempt Abraham?" It means that He put him to the trial test, put him to the proof: that He showed him forth in his proper colours. When God tempts any man it is by trying him, by putting him to the proof. This is most commonly done by leaving His creature man to act by himself, uninfluenced from above. You will remember a trial on a large scale on the part of God, of His people Israel when He

* James i. 13.

led them out of the land of Egypt. Their journey through the wilderness is called their "day of temptation," or their season of trial : as saith the Psalmist, "Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness : forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, it is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways."* God led them through that great and terrible wilderness,—for what? "to humble them and to prove them, to know what was in their heart," "as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord their God chastened them."† This is the meaning of the word, when applied to God's tempting any man. It is not in order to know the temper or disposition of His people, that God tempts them, as if He were ignorant of them : but it is to show them forth, to manifest them to themselves (so to speak), and to others as an example : or, it is again, (as in the case of Abraham,) to prove their faith, love, and obedience, that He tries them : to confirm and strengthen them by such trials, and to give succeeding ages patterns of faith and obedience,

* Psalm xciv. 8, 10.

† Deut. viii. 2, 5.

and to show in whom He is well-pleased, and with whom He is dissatisfied. Another meaning of the word to "tempt" is applicable to man in his dealings with God. Thus in this 95th Psalm, 9th verse, in "the day of temptation," it is said, "when your Fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works." It means that they unseasonably required of Him sensible proofs of His presence with them, of His power, or of His goodness, as if they had reason to doubt on these points, after all the great things He had done for them. We have an instance of this in Exodus xvii. 2, 7., when "the people did chide with Moses, saying, give us water that we may drink." "And He called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?"

There is again another meaning of the word *to tempt* in man's dealings with God, and that is when men expose themselves to dangers, from which they cannot escape but by His miraculous interposition. As when Satan took Jesus and set Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said, "If thou be the Son of God, cast

thysself down : for it is written," (and then the devil quoted Scripture to suit his purpose, as his ministers and his children in this world often do,) "It is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." And what was our Lord's reply? "It is written again," true what you have said is written, but it is written again, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."* You shall not doubt Him,—and you shall not presumptuously try Him, and call upon Him to work miracles in your behalf, for He has given you reason to guide you, and strength sufficient for the duties He requires of you, and many proofs of His watchful care, and kind providence. "Thou shalt not tempt Him" therefore in either of these senses.

We now come to the last meaning of the word I have to mention, and that is in the sense of allurement and seduction. As we have seen, in this sense it is never applicable to God's dealings with us, but only to Satan the great instigator of evil, and to man in his dealings with his fellows. The tempting with evil is

* Matt. iv. 5, 6. 7.

restricted to Satan and his confederates, wicked men, and wicked angels: Satan tempts us to bring us to sin, to bring us to a contempt of God and His laws, and to bring us to destruction. He lays traps and snares for us, yes, even in our best actions, that we may be induced to take the merit of them to ourselves, instead of giving it to God “who worketh all our works in us.” He tempts with pride, and vanity, and riches,—with age and poverty too, for it is said, “lest I be poor and steal,”* and in a thousand other ways it would be difficult now to mention. He tempted David to number the people of Israel as we learn from 1 Chron xxi. 1. “And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.” David gloried in his thousands upon thousands, and God thinned his thousands by pestilence, “The Lord sent pestilence upon Israel, and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men.”† Satan tempted our blessed Lord and Saviour Himself; “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.” It was an attempt to draw Jesus from His Father’s will, “All these things will I give thee,”‡ if you will acknowledge me as the God of

* Prov. xxx. 9. † 1 Chron. xxi. 14. ‡ Matt. iv. 1, 9.

this world. O with how many has this temptation been successful! how many have bartered their soul's welfare for the things of earth! But it was not so with Jesus, our Lord and master: though "tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin:"* He never gave way to temptation: "get thee hence, Satan;" (He could say) "for it is written,"—(see how He wielded the sword of the Spirit in His defence,)—"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."† You observe that God tempts or tries His people, for their good always, as He tempted Abraham: and that Satan tempts them to evil, and to their destruction, were they not restrained, to ruin both of soul and body.

First then, we have to consider temptations as coming from God, either directly, or indirectly, *i.e.*, either sent of set purpose, as in the case of Abraham, or suffered to come upon us from the enemies of God, but still for our good always, overruled and restrained for that object. God, I say, directly tries His people with regard to their bodies, which of His children does not know what it is to be thus tried, as regards

* Heb. iv. 15.

† Matt. iv. 10.

their health or circumstances? If any one supposes that the children of God are different from others animally considered, he is mistaken. Their animal feelings are the same as those of others, as those of all men: they cannot welcome afflictions; they would rather be without them, who would not? "No chastening for the present," (*i.e.*, while it lasts,) "seemeth to be joyous, but grievous." It is grievous to God's children, to one and all of them, "nevertheless afterward" (in their case says the Apostle,) "it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."* When they know that the Lord sends afflictions in love, not in anger, to manifest them, "to humble them and to prove them," to do them good at their latter end; when they are once convinced that "He chasteneth them for their profit, that they may be partakers of His holiness;"† that having no holiness of their own, they may be guided into that way of holiness, "without which no man shall see the Lord."‡ In this light and this light alone, (I say,) they can welcome temptations, they can patiently endure, "seeing Him that is invisible." They can kiss

* Heb. xii. 11. † Heb. xii. 10. ‡ Heb. xii. 14.

the rod that correcteth them, knowing that thereby they are weaned from “the things of earth,” and brought to “set their affections on things above,”* and that thus alone can they be made permanently happy. And then again indirectly God tries His people. He suffers them for a time to be tempted by the instrumentality of His enemies, His enemies and theirs. He leaves the creature, man or devil, to act against His children, and this is a sore trial to them. Now in what way does God allow Satan, or Satan’s confederates among men, to throw their darts against the persons of His people? Need I remind you of the instance of Job: “Doth Job fear God for nought,” said Satan? Is it not from self-interest, for the good he gets by it? “Hast not thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?”—fenced him in as it were,—“Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face.”† Well the Lord permitted Satan to try him with troubles on his substance and his friends: his

* Col. iii. 2.

† Job i. 9, 10, 11.

flocks and herds failed him, his servants failed him, his family failed him: and what was the result of the trial? "Naked came I out of my mother's womb," (said the man of God) "and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave and the LORD hath taken away: blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."* But Satan had another trial in store,—sharper than the first: "Skin for skin," (he said) "yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth Thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy face."† And so God gave him permission again, and he "went forth and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown:" and what once more was the result? "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God" (Job said) "and shall we not receive evil?" That is, if for so many years we have been experiencing His lovingkindness, shall we repine when His chastening hand is upon us? "In all this did not Job sin with his lips."‡ And although in his intercourse with his friends he could not afterwards escape the reproach of "charging

* Job i. 21, 22. † Job ii. 4, 5. ‡ Job ii. 7, 10.

God foolishly,"—yet when "the Lord answered him out of the whirlwind,"* he confessed that "he had uttered that he understood not;—things too wonderful for him," beyond his knowledge, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." This is what God wants to bring His children to, by permitting temptations to fall upon them, and then, when He has humbled them and proved them, He will deal further with them, as He did with His servant of old. "The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning."† If not in this life, yet surely in the next. "In the world ye shall have tribulation,"‡ but "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven,"—O! then it is "tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us."§ Then, "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary be at rest."|| We have another instance of the Lord's tempting or trying His people indirectly in the life of the Apostle Paul. "Lest I should be exalted above measure" (he writes) "through

* Job xl. 6. † Job xlii. 3, 5, 6, 12. ‡ John xvi. 33.

§ 2 Thess. i. 6, 7.

|| Job iii. 17.

the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me,—for this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.” He knew (you see) that it was by God’s permission that this messenger of Satan buffeted him, and that He could, if it seemed good to Him, withdraw the temptation, (whatever it might be,) and remove the trial. But “He said to me, my grace is sufficient for thee:” it is better for thee to bear it, “for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”* By this means you will become more acquainted with yourself, and more acquainted with Me, will find in Me “a very present help in time of trouble.”† And this has been the experience of all God’s people, in a greater or less degree, from the Apostle’s time to ours. There were in the Church’s early days those who “had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment;” “of whom the world was not worthy:”‡ and there have been those in the Church’s later days, at the time of the Reformation, who have undergone the like afflictions, yea, have endured the most painful and ignominious death “for

* 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8, 9. † Psalm xlv. 1. ‡ Heb. xi. 36, 38.

the testimony of Jesus.”* And although it has pleased God in our times to restrain the power of His enemies, to put “His hook in their nose, and His bridle in their lips,”† we know not what might happen if He should again leave the creature,—Devil or man,—to work his will. The enmity is the same as ever: the heart of man is as “deceitful,” as ever, and as “desperately wicked.”‡ This is shown in the temptations to which the children of God are yet subject. Their enemies can and do still aim their darts at their reputation, and if they do not strike to their injury, no thanks to those who throw them. The Devil is the Father of liars, and he has many dutiful children. It is a great trial to believers, to be thus aimed at, and to have their peace disturbed. They know how the Holy Spirit wishes them to think, speak, and act: but the world, working in confederacy with Satan, is not willing to let them go on in “the comfort of the Holy Ghost.”§ And thus (being of like passions with others) their minds are disturbed, and their tranquillity destroyed. But they should bear in mind, that the Lord allows their enemies so to act: His

* Rev. i. 9. † Isaiah xxxvii. 29. ‡ Jer. xvii. 9. § Acts ix. 31.

not restraining them is to show them out, to prove what they are. They should remember David's expression when Shimei cursed him, "Let him alone," (he said,) "and let him curse; for the LORD hath bidden him."*

Then, there is temptation on Satan's part, to which the believer is subject, and that is in the sense of allurement or seduction to evil, the traps or snares of the devil. And O what a trial that is to a child of God! The Devil does not perhaps,—certainly does not always—tempt God's people with the same baits that he uses for the world that lieth in wickedness: but he has trials in store for them. He tries to draw them off from a belief in justification by Christ alone, and sanctification by the Spirit of Christ alone: he tries to shake them in their belief that they are the "called and chosen and faithful,"† "servants of God:"‡ and so for a time he weakens and destroys their peace, and keeps them from glorifying God. For it is only from a grateful heart,—a heart that feels its interest in God's great salvation,—that we can glorify God. The "things that accompany salvation,"§ are said to be "things freely given to us of

* 2 Sam. xvi. 11. † Rev. xvii. 14. ‡ 1 Peter ii. 16. § Heb. vi. 9.

God :”* and it is only as we receive and realize these things by faith, that we can “render back to Him His gifts in songs of praise.” But remember this with regard to the devil’s temptations, that God “will not suffer” His children “to be tempted above that they are able,”—we have express promise of Holy Writ to that effect,—He “will with the temptation also make a way to escape that they may be able to bear it.”† Some people say,—some of God’s people, I mean,—that “none are so tried as they;” but what does God Himself say in His Word?—“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man :” the kind of temptation is the same to all, though the degrees of it may be different in different cases. Do not think therefore that you are more hardly treated than others : or that you are subject to trials and temptations from which others are exempt. It is not so ;—“there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.” What then is to be your comfort ? O “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able :” One word as to that last expression, “above that ye are able.” Is man

* 1 Cor. ii. 12.

† 1 Cor. x. 13.

able then? Has he power of himself to bear temptation? Has he any essential strength? We must go to the Apostle's own recorded expression to supply us with an answer, to explain to us his meaning in these words: "When I am weak," (says he,) "then am I strong."* Never so strong as when he most felt his weakness. A man must be self-emptied, before he can be filled with the power of God. So the Apostle here was "weak" in himself, "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."† That is what he means when he says "God will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." "His strength shall be perfected in your weakness:"‡ "He will not suffer His faithfulness to fail,"§—therefore He will protect you against His and your enemies. The Lord's people (I say) being self-emptied, are authorized to draw on the treasury of divine grace, and shall receive "grace to help in time of need."|| Their strength is not their own, but it never fails them, when they call in the aid of their "Helper and Defender." "Being justified by faith they have peace with God through our

* 2 Cor. xii. 10. + Ephes. vi. 10. † 2 Cor. xii. 9.

§ Psalm lxxxix. 33. || Heb. iv. 16.

Lord Jesus Christ:"* He is their Helper and Defender; there is great strength in believing themselves justified, standing in the perfect righteousness of the great Captain of their salvation, washed with His blood, and protected by His shield. It is this lifts up the heads of His people in the day of battle. Then they are sanctified as well as justified. However imperfect this may be at present, a day will come (they know,) in which "the very God of peace will sanctify them wholly:"† and even now, by the power of His indwelling Spirit, the faculties of their souls are consecrated to God, and no longer occupied altogether with the things of time and sense. This is shown by their being a praying people, "in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving making their requests known to God."‡ Praying as they walk by the way, praying in their inmost souls, when no one else knows aught of it, praying when they are sitting in the house, at work in the field, or when they retire to rest. This is why they are strong to resist temptation, they call in God's strength, conscious of their own weakness, and this never fails them in the

* Rom. v. 1. + 1 Thess. v. 23. † Phil. iv. 6.

hour of need. O may He enable us to lay hold of this blessed assurance, with full grasp as it were! We must expect trials of one sort or another, they are common to man, and the Lord sees it for our good that we should not be exempt from them: but may we know and believe that God “will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able:”* that He will be strength to us in our weakness, a very present help in time of trouble.

We now come in the last place to see the truth of that clause in the text which says, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation.” This follows as a matter of course, if what we have learned as to God’s object in sending or permitting temptations be true. Trials come from Him either directly or indirectly: they are either sent of set purpose; or permitted to come upon us, “to humble us, and to prove us, to see what is in our hearts,” to manifest this both to ourselves and others,—and finally “to do us good at our latter end:”† so that the man who patiently endures these temptations, seeing the hand of God in them, may well be said to be “blessed.” He is under that discipline,

* 1 Cor. x. 13.

† Deut. viii. 2. 16.

that chastisement, (if need be,) whereof all the sons of God are partakers, and which leads, (which is the means of bringing us,) to life eternal. “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation,” (says our text,) “for when he is tried,” (when his trials are over) “he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.” The trials, the chastisements, are a proof of His love. “Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth : and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.”* This is the Church’s judgment. “When we are judged,” (says St. Paul) “we are chastened of the Lord,”—that is our judgment,—“that we may not be condemned with the world,”†—that we may not share in the judgment and condemnation of the world. The world that lieth in wickedness shall be judged and condemned in the great day of the Lord: but the children of God shall be “accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass,”—the outpouring of His wrath on a godless world,—“and to stand before the Son of Man,”‡ “unblameable and unreprieveable in His sight.”§

* Heb. xii. 6.

† 1 Cor. xi. 32.

‡ Luke xxi. 36.

§ Col. i. 22.

Now I say what a blessing it is to be assured of this! It may well be said “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation,”—seeing the hand of God in it: it is a proof of His Fatherly affection: and if we receive any token of His love, remember, it is an assurance of His everlasting love, for whom He loveth, “He loveth unto the end.”* Wherever His Spirit “hath begun a good work, He will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:”† until this dispensation of grace be swallowed up by Christ’s great day of glory. “He shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.”

Bear in mind too that the Lord will not “suffer His people to be tempted above that they are able; but will with the temptation,” (with the trial of whatever kind,) “also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it.”‡ He lays no more on His people than He enables them to bear. And with regard to our enemies ghostly or bodily, He can say, to one and all of them, “Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.”§ Or if God does not see good to re-

* John xiii. 1.

+ Phil. i. 6.

† 1 Cor. x. 13.

§ Job xxxviii. 11.

move a trial, as in the case of Paul, or does not (for His own wise purposes) make a way to escape, as in the case of the blessed martyrs, yet can He, and He will, give strength in the hour of need. This is His promise to His people when they tread the furnace of affliction, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be."* Can we doubt that He thus supported His suffering saints in the hot days of persecution? Or that He would again do so, were such days to recur? For long has He restrained the wickedness of men in this our land,—*i.e.*, He has not suffered it to make head against His Church and people: we pray that He may continue to restrain it, and "give peace in our time:" but should it be otherwise, sure we are that He will give strength according to the day,—"shoes of iron and brass" for the hot furnace. O my brethren, may God the Spirit cause you and me to know the place of strength! If we are overcome by temptations, remember the fault is ours, for not calling on the name of the Lord: on His strength in our weakness. "All power is given unto Him in heaven and on earth:"† spirits as well as men

* Deut. xxxiii. 25.

+ Matt. xxviii. 18.

are under His control: "He can still the raging of the sea, and the madness of the people."* May He cause us to realize this great truth to His praise and glory.

* Psalm lxxv. 7.

SERMON VII.

2 CORINTHIANS v. 20, 21.

“ Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.

“ For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin ; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

A FEW verses before the text, the Apostle says, that “ all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ :” * he then adds, that “ He hath given to us,” (the Apostles of that day, and the ministers of this,) “ the

* Verse 18.

ministry of reconciliation," and in the next verse he says again, "hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." Having thus, as it were, shown his credentials as an ambassador for Christ, having shown that he had been duly appointed and ordained a minister of the word of reconciliation, he at once proceeds to deliver the message with which he was charged, the glorious truth, the glad tidings, which he besought them to hear, that "God hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ," that "He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him :"* and to this the Apostle subjoins this anxious desire and prayer, "we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."†

Now we are not to understand this prayer on his part, as if anything remained to be done on ours to complete the reconciliation between God and His people: the Apostle distinctly says that "God hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ:" what Christ has already done, cannot remain for us to do: no,—but what he means is this, we pray you to receive "the word of reconciliation," which we are charged to deliver;

* Verse 21.

† Verse 20.

“be ye reconciled to God” with regard to every part of His revealed Word; do not set up your worldly wisdom against God’s truth, “become fools that ye may be wise,”* “Search the Scriptures,” and you will reconcile one passage with another, “Compare spiritual things with spiritual,”† and when once you have got the master-key, you will unlock all the treasures of grace, and see the inestimable value of the whole: stones which hitherto ye have rejected, will find their place in the spiritual building, what is not solid in the foundation, or unsound in the superstructure, will make way for lively stones; truths will be duly estimated, and fitly framed together, till the whole stands before you, the completest and the fairest fabric, that was ever planned by divine love, and executed by Almighty power. “Be ye reconciled” to God’s word of grace, to Him, as He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures, and receive the truth here taught you, “to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself,”‡ and again, that “He made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” This is the

* 1 Cor. iii. 18. † 1 Cor. ii. 13. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 19.

truth, which you have to reconcile to your minds, and which you have to reconcile yourselves to, before you can get peace to your souls, and “we pray you therefore to receive it.”

The reconciliation on the part of God to sinful man, to those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, has been accomplished. “God hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ:” “God was in Christ reconciling the world,” *i.e.*, not His covenant people among the Jews only, but as they are found among the Gentiles also all the world over, and all sorts and conditions of men on the face of the earth, rich and poor, bond and free, “God in Christ reconciled them unto Himself:” and how was this accomplished? “Not imputing their trespasses unto them;”* *i.e.*, removing that which excited His displeasure against them, and incensed His wrath, and without the removal of which He could not look with favour upon them, or receive them again unto Himself:—and how did He remove it? By “making Him,” (His only-begotten and well-beloved Son,) “to be sin for us, who knew no sin,”† making Him “bear our sins in His own body on the tree,”‡ making

* 2 Cor. v. 19. † 2 Cor. v. 21. ‡ 1 Peter ii. 24.

Him an offering for sin, charging Him with the sins of His people, transferring the guilt from them to Him, and so He made sin by imputation, in order that they by imputation of His righteousness, might become righteous: for "He knew no sin," He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners,"* and therefore a spotless sacrifice, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him," the righteousness of God, *i.e.*, that that righteousness might be imputed to us, which God approved of, and accepted, in Christ Jesus.

Now this being the case, "we pray you in Christ's stead," says the Apostle, "be ye reconciled to God." He does not imply, and we are not to understand, that man has the power in himself, has ability of his own to comply with this exhortation, to be reconciled to God,—man has no natural power, no power of his own to comply with it: but the Apostle is setting forth the reconciled mind of God towards His people, and His readiness, His willingness, to receive every repentant sinner, who seeks mercy in the way of His appointment. And surely we cannot doubt that this is plainly manifested to us

* Heb. vii. 26.

throughout the Scriptures: if Jesus bowed His head upon the cross, and said "It is finished," (viz. all that the Father hath given me to do): and if such proclamations are made from heaven as these, "I was angry with thee, but mine anger is turned away:"* "Fury is not in me saith the Lord:"† "for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."‡ There cannot, after this, be any doubt of God's complete reconciliation to His people: but how are they to be reconciled to God, to "be renewed in the spirit of their minds,"§ to take God as their guide through life, and "their portion for ever?"|| Man has no power to comply with this exhortation, but as it is given him from above, from the Father of lights, from Whom cometh every good, and every perfect gift. He has separated himself from God, and "without Him he can do nothing:"¶ it must be God's

* Isaiah xii. 1. † Isaiah xxvii. 4. ‡ Isaiah liv. 9, 10.

§ Ephes. iv. 23. || Ps. lxxiii. 26. ¶ John xv. 5.

working in Him “to will and to do,”* by His Holy Spirit, of Whom every Christian believer is “born again” and “indwelt;” it must be by this ingrafting and abiding in the Vine, and by this alone, that any fruit can be produced: it is only by union with Christ, being members of His mystical body, that any life is communicated to us. You remember the Prophet’s surprise when the Lord set him down in the valley of dry bones, and asked, “Can these bones live?” “O Lord God, thou knowest,” was the reply, and he was directed to prophecy to those bones, and to call upon them to awake, but it was not till the Lord exerted His power that there was a “shaking among them, and the bones came together, bone to bone, and the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them,” and then God must breathe upon them with the breath of Heaven before “these slain could live.”† Now here we have revealed to us the total inability of man, in his natural state, to put forth any act of spiritual life, as much so, as for a corpse to put forth any act of natural life: but wherever and whenever God pleases, He communicates power

* Phil. ii 13.

† See Ezekiel xxxvii. 3-10.

to His Word, and causes that Word to become efficacious, so that the sinner, though he cannot exert himself, will arise and live if the power of God enable him, and His Spirit give him life. "And you hath He quickened," (says the Apostle,) "who were dead in trespasses and sins."*

Now the grand means which God has ordained, to awaken the sinner, is the preaching of the everlasting Gospel. "It pleases God," (says St. Paul,) "by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe:"† "for the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God:" *i.e.*, by this means is exerted the power of God, "by preaching the cross," or as our text expresses it, by setting forth "Christ made sin for us." "I determined not to know anything amongst you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified:"‡ *i.e.*, Christ made sin, standing in the stead of all His people, the whole weight of their sins on Him, in order that He might be "smitten, stricken of God, and afflicted" in their place, and endure the "bitter pains of eternal death" for them. This

* Eph. ii. 1. † 1 Cor. i. 21. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 2.

is the sum and substance of the Gospel,—glad tidings indeed to all that believe! And the setting forth of this plain subject “by the foolishness of preaching,” is the grand means in the hand of God, of gathering the vessels of mercy, and of bringing each to desire reconciliation with Him in mind, and heart, and life: with Him, who has Himself been all along reconciled to them in the Son of His love.

And then, what encouragement, to poor sinners is gathered from the way and manner in which God uses this grand means for the conversion and salvation of His people! How are we to deliver His message to you? By threatening you with His wrath? By holding out to you the cup of His fury? Nay, this may be necessary to rouse and forewarn an unbelieving world, but this is not the way to address the broken spirits and contrite hearts of poor wounded sinners. No, “we pray you in Christ’s stead,—as His ambassadors, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, be ye reconciled to God.” Joy and peace can only come to you by believing, we pray you not to throw away your peace and comfort: take God at His word, receive the report we bring, this blessed word

of reconciliation with which we are charged, and which we are commanded to deliver, "that God hath reconciled you to Himself, having made Him to be sin for you, who knew no sin, that ye might be made the righteousness of God in Him." This is the ministry committed to us, and surely this display of the way and manner in which it is to be instrumental to God's great design, gives us a strong assurance that all "is finished," that all things are now ready, and that whosoever will, may come, believe and live. The Gospel is to be preached to every creature under heaven: Christ is to be set forth and made known in all the world, in the fulness of His redemption, and in the completeness of His righteousness: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature:"* wherever then a creature is found, willing to take God at His word, to receive this word of reconciliation, to reconcile His mind with God's revealed mind, being made willing in the day of God's power, by Him "Who alone worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure,"† wherever such an one is found, that sinner is welcome to come and "take of the

* Mark xvi. 15.

† Phil. ii. 13.

water of life freely,"* to come to Him, who is and has been all along reconciled to him through Jesus Christ. We may be speaking to some, who have not long been convinced of their lost and miserable condition, nay, who for the first time see the "exceeding sinfulness of sin,"† feel themselves wretched sinners, and stand therefore at a distance from God, fearing He should spurn them from His presence, as they know they deserve to be spurned, and cast into outer darkness. Now, here is their encouragement: that God condescends to invite, nay to beseech them to be reconciled to Him, that He has appointed an order of men, who have succeeded each other from the times of the Apostles, and whom He will preserve till the last trumpet shall sound, to go forth and deliver His message, and to entreat sinners in Christ's stead, as though God did beseech them by us, to be reconciled to Him. May God bless His own word to their peace and comfort! He has revealed Himself to us, as the "LORD God, merciful and gracious:"‡ as willing to save, as He is able to save: oh! why then does anyone, who has been convinced of his sinfulness and

* Rev. xxii. 17. † Rom. vii. 13. ‡ Exodus xxxiv. 6.

danger: who has been suspended, as it were, over the bottomless pit, and enabled to realize the just and righteous retribution of Jehovah, in that lake of fire and brimstone that is for ever rolling there: we say, why should anyone, under such impressions, and with the blessed words of the text before their eyes, stand out against their gracious import? Has not God said of all and every one in this condition, "let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, and He will abundantly pardon:"* and surely we cannot but see the truth of this in the fact that God should of Himself deliver up His own Son for us men and for our salvation, that He should reconcile Himself to those, who had no one right or title, who could urge no plea whatever to the smallest token of His pity and of His love. And then that He should send His messengers to tell and to show to all who need His aid, "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world,"†— who taketh it away completely, the whole power of it; the only thing that can make God angry with the creatures of His power, He taketh away, He has put it out of the way, and

* Isaiah lv. 7.

† John i. 29.

made an end of it. And then further these gracious tidings, that “in Him,” in this Lamb of God, “all that believe” (and what is believing? coming to Jesus, and resting our souls upon Him and Him alone for eternal salvation,) “in Him all that believe, are justified from all things,”* “that Christ is the end of the law,” (answers the purpose of the fulfilment of the law) “for righteousness to every one that believeth.”† These truths, we think, should meet and overcome the objections of all faint yet contrite hearts. There is no greater mistake than that which seeks to qualify sinners, in some manner or other, for the gracious notice of Him, whose just wrath they have provoked. It is only “in the Beloved,”‡ and not in ourselves, or anything that we can do, that we can ever be accepted.

Come therefore, my brethren, just as you are, all ye that feel your need of Jesus: your sin has been bound to Him, and He has suffered its penalty and made an end of it, and bids you welcome just as you are. It is as sinners you must be saved, if you are saved at all, He came into the world to save such: come then, and

* Acts xiii. 39. † Rom. x. 4. ‡ Ephes. i. 6.

cast yourselves at the foot of the cross, "believe and be saved,"* "look and live," and "be ye reconciled to God," in the way of His own appointing. "This is my beloved Son," He said, "in whom I am well pleased,"† and this is equally true of all who are in Him, of all who seek salvation in and through Jesus.

Now it is this plain statement of His truth, this "record of His Son,"‡ that God makes use of for the establishment as well as for the awakening and drawing towards Him, of those that are His: His, in bonds that never can be broken, according to His everlasting covenant. Though they may be wandering far distant from Him, in the midst of the world, and not to be distinguished by the outward eye, yet in this way, by "whispering these glad tidings to their hearts," the Lord brings them to Himself, and causes them to return to Him: it is by this plain and simple statement. And so it is by the plain and simple setting forth of "Christ crucified," "Christ made sin for us," that we may be justified: it is the constant setting forth of this, in the various points of view in which this great subject is to be presented, it is the

* Acts xvi. 31. † Matt. iii. 17. ‡ 1 John v. 10.

constant, plain, and simple preaching of the cross, which God not only will own to awaken sinners at the first, but to establish, nourish, and build them up all the days of their life. "The just shall live by faith," and "Christ made our sin, and we made His righteousness," is the food of faith. The ministry of the word of reconciliation, of the Gospel of Christ, is expressly said to be for "the perfecting of the saints for the edifying of the body of Christ."* The "Church," "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all,"† is thus kept "through faith by the power of God:"‡ believers are thus preserved, thus nourished, and conducted all their days upon earth, while at a distance from their Father's house. But there are many, (alas, that it should so be!) there are many hearts untouched that never felt their misery and danger as sinners, who will yet lend their ears to the preaching of the cross, and they may be for a time well pleased: but having no real hunger for the bread of life, no true thirst for its waters, they turn aside first to one error, and then to another, (and there are errors enough, and mistaken views in plenty floating

* Ephes. iv. 12. † Ephes. i. 22, 23. ‡ 1 Peter i. 5.

about at this time,) “ever learning,” it is said of them, “and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth,”—“having a form of godliness, but denying the power,”* (Christ the power of God,) “who will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts heap to themselves teachers, and turn away their ears from the truth:”† (this is the Apostle’s description of them,) but, says he, “their folly shall be manifest unto all men:”‡ time will show upon what foundation their hopes are built. There are many even in this day, like those of whom the Apostle spake, “The Jews require a sign,” people are looking for something to strike their attention, and excite their feelings, and “the Greeks seek after wisdom,”§ others are seeking after a display of man’s wisdom, instead of God’s truth: but observe what the Apostle adds, though this be the case, and “Christ made sin, and we made righteousness,” is a stumbling-block to the one, and foolishness to the other: yet the ambassadors of Christ deliver their message, “whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear,”|| we have our instructions from the great King of

* 2 Tim. iii. 7, 5. + 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4. † 2 Tim. iii. 9.
§ 1 Cor. i. 22, 23. || Ezekiel iii. 11.

kings, what we speak are the "oracles of God," we preach Christ crucified, to one party a "stumbling-block," to another "foolishness," "but to them that are called, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."* This dispensation was typified in the bread, by which the children of Israel were fed in the wilderness, the manna, which had to be gathered every day, and fresh every day: the same thing was shewn in the shewbread, this was to be renewed continually, but still it was bread, the same thing. So it was too, that in the morning and evening sacrifice throughout the year, there was a lamb offered, always the same, a lamb. And so it is, my brethren, with us: ministers must set forth Christ in every point of view in which He is exhibited to us in the Word of God, but which all issue in His sacrifice upon the cross: "Christ crucified," "made sin for us:" and our hearers should come, (as we trust that many of you do,) to the house of God, not to hear something new, not to find any display of man's wisdom, but looking to the Saviour alone, the "Lamb of God," the "Bread of life," that through the means of His own appointment, though it be

* 1 Cor. i. 24.

the “foolishness of preaching,” you may receive Him, and be enabled to feed upon Him: and may thus be nourished and encouraged by that very word, which is the means in the hand of God, “of calling men out of darkness into His marvellous light.”* O what reason will you have for thankfulness, if you are enabled, my brethren, to receive this truth for yourselves, which we are endeavouring to set before you; that “God hath reconciled you to Himself by Jesus Christ,”† that “He was made sin for you, and you made His righteousness,” that when He put away all the transgressions of that innumerable multitude “out of every kindred and people and tongue”‡ that will appear at the last with Him as redeemed by His blood, that your sin was blotted out: that He had you in His view among “the Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven.”§ This and this only will bring relief and comfort to the mind, yea, “joy and peace in believing;”|| a good hope through grace of an interest in a covenant God and His great salvation; a good and assured hope of an interest in the great and glorious atonement made upon the cross will

* 1 Peter ii. 9. † 2 Cor. v. 18. ‡ Rev. v. 9.
§ Heb. xii. 23. || Rom. xv. 13.

throw a sunbeam along our path, will put sweetness into all the trials and afflictions that meet us in the way, “will give beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”* It will prove a rich cordial to our minds, a firm support “to the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees,”† if we consider that whatever accusations may be brought against us, (and God knows how truly!) they are all answered, and answered fully, by “Christ made sin for us,” and pleading as our “Advocate with the Father,” as “the propitiation for our sins.”‡ For what can the law threaten us with? He has magnified the law and made it honourable by fulfilling its every demand, and submitting to the penalty on the part of His people who broke it. What can justice demand? Justice has been satisfied, God is “just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.”§ What can the Prince of Darkness, though represented as “accusing the brethren day and night,”|| what can he bring against us, when the Redeemer has triumphed over him, “destroyed him that had the power

* Isaiah lxi. 3. † Heb. xii. 12. ‡ 1 John ii. 1, 2.

§ Rom. iii. 26.

|| Rev. xii. 10.

of death,"* and has promised "shortly to bruise him under our feet?"† "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."‡

And then again, how greatly is the mercy of God displayed in the manner in which these glad tidings are sent into the world. He does not send holy angels, (as He might,) who behold His glory, to preach the Word of Life, "to warn every man," "and to teach every man," nor does He send the departed spirits of men, either of the saved, or of the lost: if men "will not hear Moses, and the Prophets," and His Word in the mouth of His ministers, "neither would they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."§ But whom does He send? Why, "men of like passions with yourselves,"|| men who stand in need of salvation just as you do, and who are resting themselves, (if truly taught of God,) upon that very foundation, upon which they wish you to rest, and upon which they

* Heb. ii. 14. † Rom. xvi. 20. ‡ Rom. viii. 33, 34.

§ Luke xvi. 31.

|| Acts xiv. 15.

wish you to build. "We have this treasure," says the Apostle, remembering that even the Apostles were "men of like passions," the same weaknesses, and infirmities, and imperfections with those to whom they were sent, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels," in vessels of the common ordinary make, earthenware, as we say, "that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."* It is that it may be manifested, and clearly proved, that if there is any effect produced, any conviction of sin, any repentance, any faith, if there is any real good experienced, any true benefit conveyed, it is not the work of man, but of God. It is He only that can convert the soul, it is He only that can incline the heart to seek Him, as it is He only that "hath redeemed" it to Himself, that hath "reconciled it" to Him.

The Gospel-treasure is sent in "earthen vessels," of the earth, earthy, that He may have the glory, to whom alone the glory is due. One word more in conclusion, the conviction of sin lies at the root of all true religion: as self-righteousness, inherent righteousness, is at the root of all false religions. But Christ, we are

* 2 Cor. iv. 7.

told, "came not to call the righteous," (not those who thought themselves righteous, who went about to establish their own righteousness) "but sinners to repentance:"* so that however religious or righteous a person may be in his own estimation, or in that of others, he must be brought to know himself a sinner deserving the wrath of God, before he can advance one step in the "narrow way that leadeth to life"† eternal. God must open to his view this sentence of the law, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law, to do them."‡ O my brethren! if you have learned this lesson, thank God for it, and thank Him, though you may be advanced in the school of Christ, and may be old in His way, thank Him, for teaching you this lesson still.

And if, the older you grow, the more you are deeply convinced of your utterly lost and ruined state by nature, and of the humbling fact, that everything in us, so far as we are concerned, is sinful, (all but the work of the Holy Ghost,) and there is nothing in us but what (were it not for Christ's blood,) would excite the wrath of

* Matt. ix. 13. † Matt. vii. 14. ‡ Gal. iii. 10.

God, if you learn this, thank God in proportion as you are thus humbled: because in that proportion will the doctrine of the cross, "Christ crucified" and "made sin," and "His righteousness imputed to us," become dear to you. It might at first sight appear distressing for those who have been long taught of God, and walking in His ways, to find that they have not only the same view of themselves as sinners, but enlarged, and increased and more deep and affecting convictions of their sin and misery in the sight of God, than ever they had before; yet so it is by the confession of all God's people: and this is the reason: That the more dear to them He may be, that "gave Himself a ransom"* for sinners, and who hath "redeemed them" by His death "from all iniquity:"† and the brighter and clearer tokens they might have, and the clearer anticipation and foretaste of that full and complete salvation, "which is reserved in heaven" for those "who are kept" for it "through faith, and by the power of God."‡ Therefore thank God, all who have experienced this, for what you are thus taught:

"Thank Him, for all that is past,
And trust Him, for all that's to come."

* 1 Tim. ii. 6. † Titus ii. 14. ‡ 1 Peter i. 4, 5.

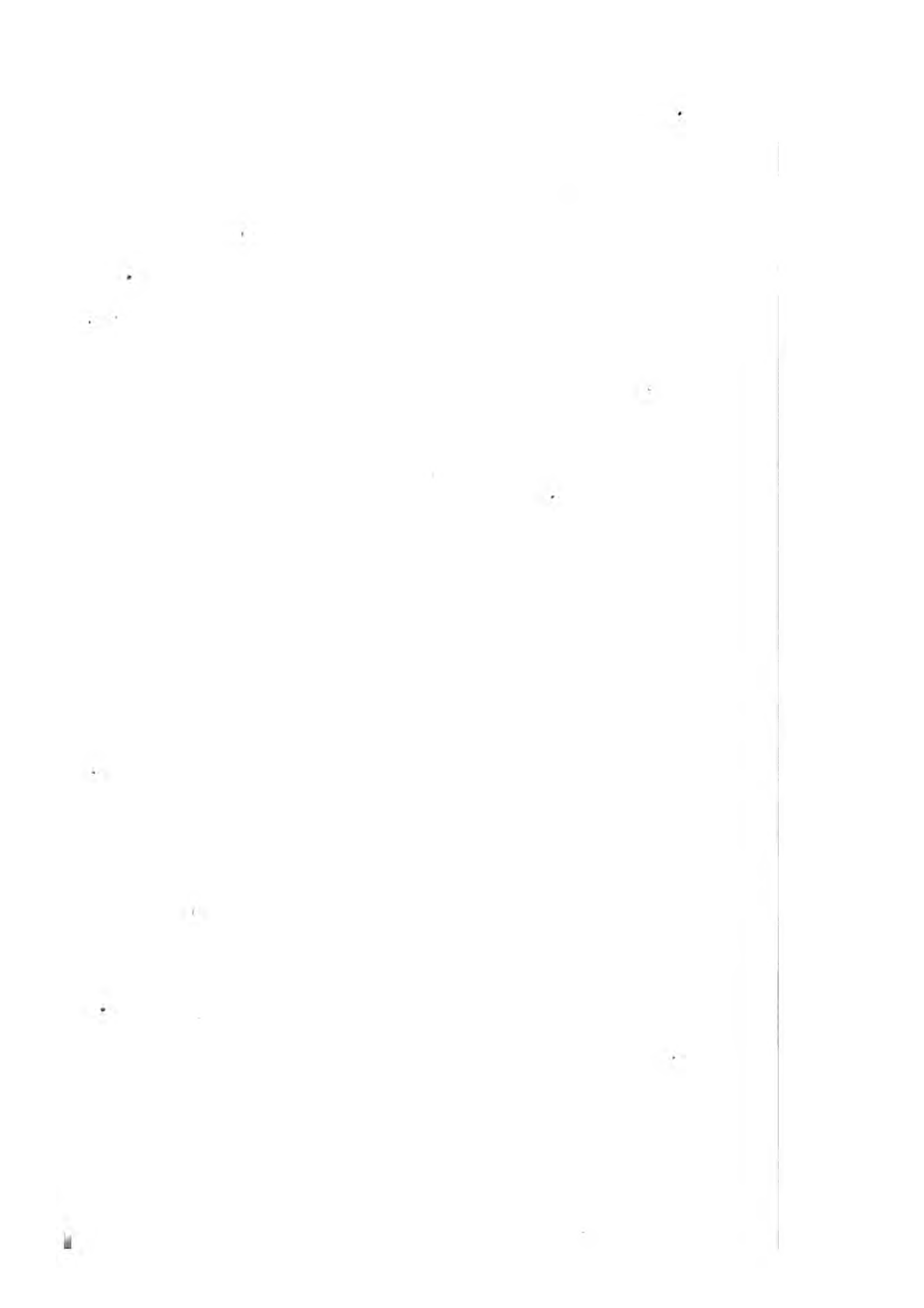
It may be truly said of the Church, as it is promised of His ancient people the Jews, “they shall be called, The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord: Sought out, A city not forsaken.”* First, “reconciled to God,” “redeemed of the Lord,” and then “sought out,” and for the future, “not forsaken.” May God lay this truth upon your hearts, and enable you to feed upon it by faith: and whensoever you hear His word, and by whomsoever ministered, may you look up to Him alone, knowing that whosoever plants, or whosoever waters, “it is God alone that gives the increase.”†

* Isaiah lxii. 12.

+ 1 Cor. iii. 6.

N.B.—This Sermon was the last preached by the late Rev. Robert Martin. It was preached at Newtown Linford on December 11th, 1870.

THE END.



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