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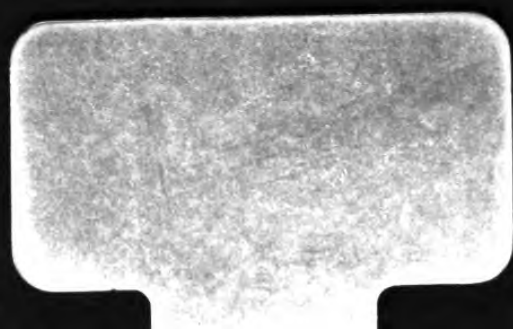
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SONS OF GOD:  
THE KNOWN AND THE UNKNOWN.



*Advent Sermons.*

*HENRY ALFORD, D.D.*

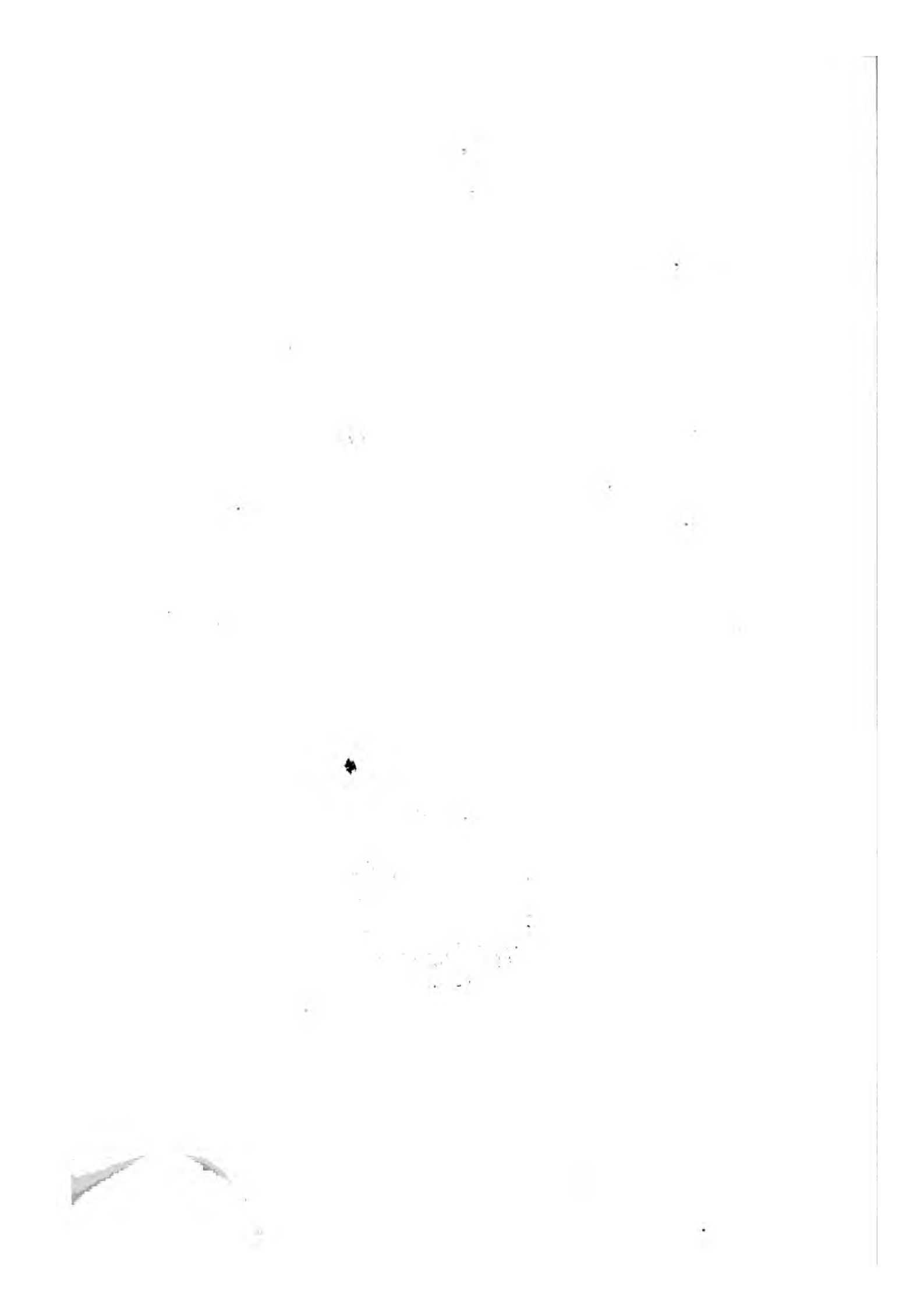








SONS OF GOD.



SONS OF GOD :  
THE KNOWN AND THE UNKNOWN.

BEING  
SERMONS PREACHED ON SUNDAY AFTERNOONS  
IN  
CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL,  
PRECEDING AND DURING  
*Advent.*

BY  
HENRY ALFORD, D.D.,  
LATE DEAN OF CANTERBURY.



HODDER AND STOUGHTON,  
27, PATERNOSTER ROW.

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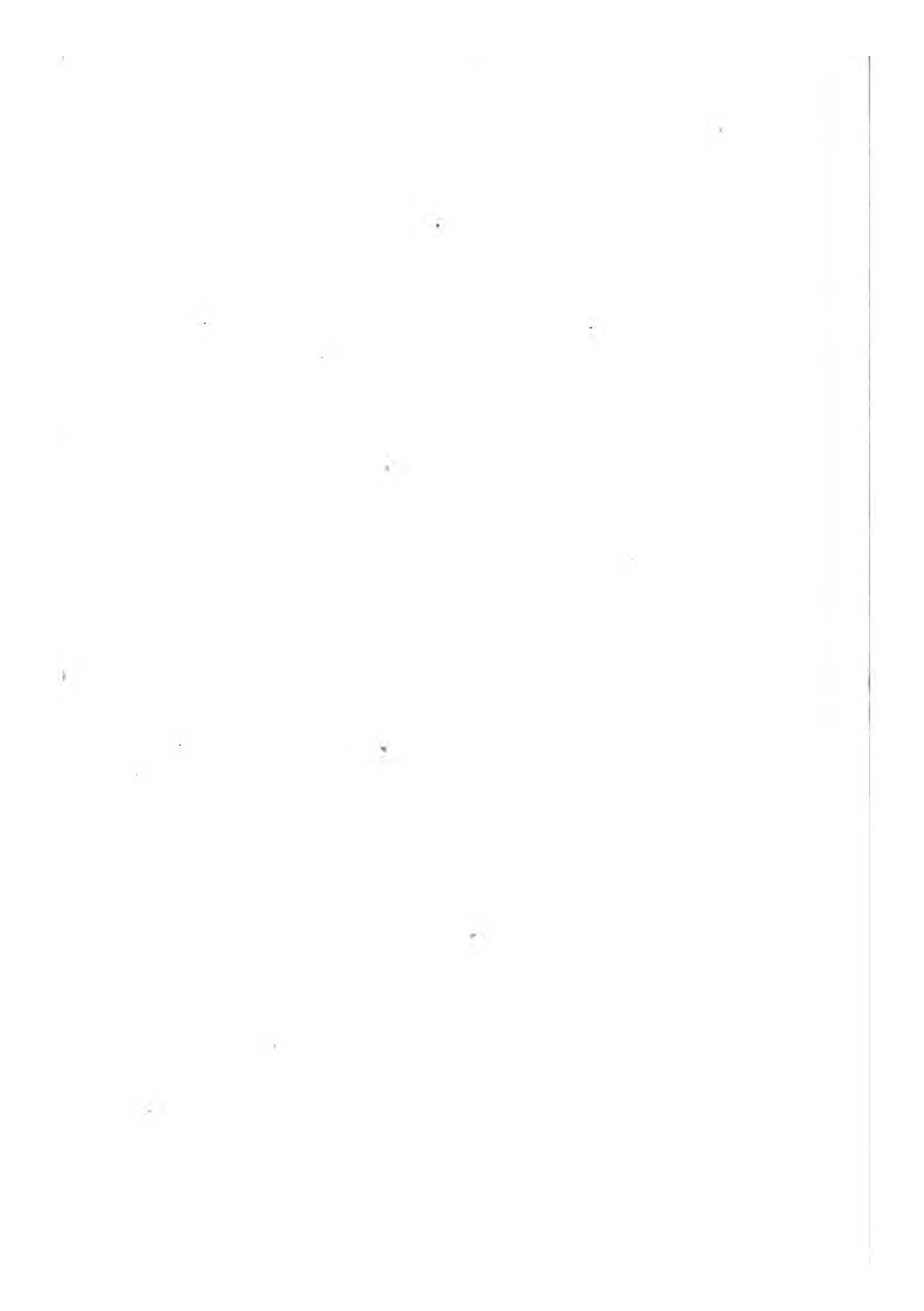
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# SERMON I.







## I.

‘Beloved, now are we the sons of God [now are we children of God], and it doth not yet appear [never yet was manifested] what we shall be.’—I JOHN iii. 2.

**I**T is my intention, should I be permitted, to spend some considerable time over the text which I have read to you. It will be seen that it divides into two parts: the former, regarding that which we are now; the latter, regarding that which we shall be hereafter. I purpose that the former of these subjects should employ us during the four Sundays between this and Advent, and the latter during the Advent season itself.

To-day, we shall take but one word for the matter of our meditation—the short word “now.” As the assertion in the former part of the text regards time present, it will not be amiss to inquire of our thoughts, What is time present? What is the meaning of “now”?

This is a matter not so plain, nor lying so much on the surface, as we might at first sight imagine. Time is altogether a mysterious thing. Let us try to speak plainly about it. Whatever we think of or imagine in our minds, two conditions are necessary for us. We cannot think without a certain succession or order of thoughts; and we cannot think of any material thing which does not possess some extension—in other words, which has not some room to stand in. This latter condition of our thought is called Space; the former is Time. Space,

we know, was created by God ; He made all things, the room in which they exist included. Space is a condition laid down by His will for the existence of all material being ; it may not be, and it does not appear to be, necessary for the existence of spiritual being : God created it, God can uncreate it, if it be His pleasure. Now, look at the other condition, Time. There is every reason to believe that Time also is nothing more than a state ordained by God for the purposes of, and as a condition of, His finite creation. Succession, the waxing onward, *i. e.*, of hours and days and years, is that without which we cannot conceive existence at all. But it is not the condition of God's own being. His being is independent of this condition which limits ours. With Him is no waxing onward, no succession of hours and days and

years. He is the High and Holy One which inhabiteth eternity. He is the Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. *We* are totally unable to imagine such a Being ; He is above, and out of, the necessary conditions of our thought. In this particular it is formally true, that His thoughts are not as our thoughts, are not bound by their conditions ; nor are His ways our ways : they are the working of one altogether in another and to us inconceivable state of existence — one of whom we can learn absolutely nothing, except those partial glimpses which are let down, so to speak, from His infinite being into the range and capacities of our finite one.

Time, then, is a condition belonging to our existence, ordained, brought in by Him who created us and all things. Let



us look further at this His ordinance, under which we find ourselves. We are accustomed to say that Time consists of three parts—Past, Present, and Future. This will do very well for a practical description of Time, or for a description of the language in which Time is expressed ; but evidently it is not an accurate one. Strictly speaking, Time consists but of two parts—Time Past and Time Future. Time Present is an inappreciable point. While we speak, it is gone. There is no portion of Time which we can arrest and make it stay by us. All our being is either behind or before us, either gone by or yet to come.

Now, what we have just said is very important towards our present inquiry. There can be no doubt of its truth. There is no such thing as “now,” properly and strictly speaking. Time is a rapid stream,

in which no point is ever stationary. But—and this is the important consideration—it is a tendency inherent in us, ever to be arresting in our thought certain portions of Time, and treating them as if they were, for certain purposes, stationary, and unaffected for the moment by the rapidity of transit of the whole. For certain purposes, I say; for it is when we want to deal with any particular action or set of actions that we thus portion out Time—for the sake, so to speak, of making a framework in which to contemplate for a while a picture which we have arrested. Just as the photographer rescues out of time an aspect of a scene in nature, or a face of man, which that scene or that face really possessed but for an instant, and perpetuates it; so we are ever making ourselves images of all manner of portions

of time, and treating them as if they were stationary and not rapidly going by. And of these portions, thus treated, we use the word "now." I may mean by "now" the veriest inappreciable instant. I may cry out, "Now or never!" when the next tick of the clock will see the opportunity gone. I may say "now," meaning in this sentence, as distinguished from the next; or meaning the half-hour during which I occupy this pulpit; or meaning the present state of society, or politics, or art, as different from a former one; or, finally, I may use "*now*" in the largest sense which our minds are capable of apprehending—as including the widest pictures of time that we can imagine, the whole of the passing life of ourselves, the whole of the ordained lifetime of the world in which we dwell.

All this will show you that the little word "*now*" in this text does require some consideration, that an inquiry is necessary to ascertain in what sense it is used—how large a portion of time it includes in its framework—what, and embracing what, is the picture which it presents to us to contemplate.

In order to ascertain this, let us look at the form of the text. "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." We have here spoken of a state going on now, seen and evident; and a state which will be at some future time, unknown because unapparent. Now this general contrast might be understood in various ways. It holds true of almost every sense which the word "*now*" will bear. What has been, of every kind, up to this point of division between Past and

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Future, is an open book, known and apparent. What will be from this moment, none can tell. Again, enlarge the boundaries of that which "now" indicates, and the contrast is just as true. The present condition of any one of us in life is a thing known and apparent; but what shall be after it, is unknown and unapparent. The family man may be left desolate, the rich man may become poor, the most unexpected changes may happen to any of us. And the contrast puts on its most solemn and striking form, when we enlarge the framework of our picture, and take in the whole of this present life as we call it. For during it we are in a state which can be described and known; the human body and the mind that inhabits it are subjects of observation and study and research, and, within certain limits, that which we



are may be confidently and precisely laid down. But what we shall be after this life—to whom has this, or when has this, ever been manifested ?

Again, it will be evident to us, my brethren, that this word “now” will take different meanings, according as we suppose St. John to be speaking of a body of men, or of individual men. If he is speaking of a certain state of a body of men, then he may, perhaps, mean by “now” the whole duration of that state of things during which that body of men shall exist. The whole body to which we belong may be spoken of in the first person. And thus “now” may mean during this current dispensation, which began with the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, and shall come to an end when the world comes to an end, but not before. This “now”

would embrace the whole trial-time of the Church, during every part of which the state of her members is a thing clear and manifest ; and the contrast will be between the Church on this side the great consummation of things, and the Church on the other side of that event.

But again, if he is regarded as speaking of himself and those to whom he is writing, then this "now" must be regarded as bounded by their individual lives in each case. That which is meant by "now are we" would cease to be when those came to an end : the plainly revealed, certain, palpable state, would terminate, and that uncertain state would set in of which it is said, " It never yet was revealed what we shall be."

Now these suppositions, that he is speaking of the Church, and that he is speaking of

individuals, do not by any means exclude one another. St. John may be speaking of the Christian Church in general, and yet so that his saying may be true of all her members, taken one by one. Both these points will come to be considered as we advance into our subject.

That which we have mainly to think of to-day, and that from which our lesson of instruction is to be derived, is the fact of there being this portion of the great stream of time marked off for us, and thus separately characterized for our benefit. With reference to the subject on which the Apostle is writing, this—this state revealed for and during this present space of time,—is all we know, and all we can speak of. A ray of light is shed down upon one portion of our course ; in that portion, all is distinct and clear—all, that is, which it is

necessary for us to know and to have revealed. And that portion is the present—that which is now going by—that which we seem to be masters of, to employ as we please. And does not this, my brethren, clothe with immense interest and importance this *present*? Does it not hereby become very precious to us, seeing that God has thus made it the bright part of our course for us to walk safely and profitably in it? “Now, while it is called to-day,” as Scripture elsewhere expresses it—now, while we move in a world which, though it contains many hard things, yet contains far more things that are clear and beyond doubt; now, while we can feel our own strength and our own weakness, while we know our friends and our enemies, our encouragements and our hindrances—O my brethren, this now, which seems

like a spot of light hemmed round by darkness, how ought we to value it, how to show ourselves anxious and earnest that no portion of it be lost for the purpose for which it has been given ! And what is that purpose ? The very form of the text shows us this. It is given us to lead on to an unknown future. I am not going to-day to speak of this unknown future, but I deal merely with the fact that it lies before us, and that this portion of our existence which we call present, is created in order to lead on to it. We stand as it were on a promontory, and before and around us are the infinite waters. By our life here, by our gathering strength and our forming ourselves here, will the character of that vast unknown voyage be determined. Now these are very common thoughts : there is nothing new in them ; but, whenever and

by whomsoever uttered, they are truly very solemn thoughts. Remember, that as it is by very common acts and daily recurring duties that the main work of life must be carried on, so it is by these common thoughts made solemn that the soul's great work must be done. What am I? What am I made for? Where am I going? After all, my brethren, these are the questions which, after having been asked by various voices in vain, perhaps, for years, at last one day ring through the chamber of the soul, so that she arouses herself and puts on her armour, and goes forth in her might, to do that for which her God has made her. And so this little simple word "now,"—so full, as we have seen, of mystery when we try to understand it at all, so full of deep meaning, so full of workings for a far-



off future,—this seed-plot of unknown harvests, this treasure-house of jewels for a future glorious bridal—who can tell whether the having spent half-an-hour in meditating on it may not by God's blessing open some mind or some minds to its importance past all value, persuade some one among you to regard this bright known present as a great ordinance of God respecting you? They are passing by us, my friends, these golden moments—passing quicker than we can watch them. Have we grasped them, or have we lost them? There is no spectacle on earth sadder than that of a life wasted—a creature made for eternity sitting still and letting time, which is eternity's training-hour, slip by unheeded. And yet this sad spectacle, how often do we see it—how often do we find ourselves on the verge of furnishing it

in our own persons! What a grand saying is that Divine command, "Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might"! How full of wisdom, how full also of loving hearty counsel for us all! "Yes," says some one who is listening to me; "but my hand does not find anything to do. When it does, I may try to comply with the injunction." Oh vain and frivolous answer! Now dwelling in the brightness, and the great unapparent before thee, and nothing to do? Judge of the reasonableness of this by an example. We must come to familiar things before our words are felt. We must say something to be found fault with in these threadbare days, before we say anything that any one cares about. Take it then in this shape: I see some people spending a few days in a great city previous to making a long and un-



known journey. They have been sent there specially to make every preparation possible for their way. Their resources are ample for each: they are surrounded with shops where everything can be procured which they may want. Their time is uncertain—to-night they may be summoned away, or to-morrow. I see them rising early to take count of their purchases, and set down the coming day's work. I see them when the markets are opened busy among the stores, pausing but a moment, even for refreshment. This goes on all day; and at night they sit down and take counsel about the great unknown journey! Has every contingency been provided for—every possible event supplied by anticipation? Are their preparations for transit and for portage complete? And whatever defects this council discloses, are care-

fully and without delay filled up. And this is the care which children of this world, which reasonable men, bestow ; and whoever did not bestow it would be despised and derided by all. O fools and slow of heart, we may well exclaim, when we turn to the great matter in hand. For what is the situation described, but our own? What are we but sojourners in this great city of manifold opportunities, this world so richly furnished with God's stores? What are all around us but warehouses of nature, of society, of experience, of reading—all to fit us out for that great unknown journey which is before every one of us? And have we not each one been supplied with the most ample means wherewith to purchase our great outfit? What are our bodily senses and the mind which presides over them, but the current coin of this great

city, which will never be dishonoured in any of its marts? With expenditure of these, we may gather whatever can be needed from Nature, from Providence, from Grace, for our use in that unknown country. Shall the world's travellers rise early and take count of their stores, and shall we lie in slumber while the great concern takes its own chance? Shall they go eagerly all the day long from shop to shop, and we take no trouble? Shall they hold ever their counsels to devise all that may be expedient, and we give not a thought to the matter? We are not a whit more sure of our time than they. A week, a day, an hour, a minute, may be all that we have to stay in this "now," this bright revealed spot, this of which it can be said "now are we" this or that; and then we shall glide out into the great unfathomable future, to

navigate it as we may. O my brethren, how can a slothful life, how can an aimless life, how can a trifling life, be pardonable in such men—with such certainties around them—with such uncertainties before them ?

“ The eternities are shrouded,  
Space eludes our ken ;  
But not earth—nor time for duty,  
Nor our fellow-men.”

With such certainties, I said, around them. Of these certainties themselves, their nature and their calls upon us, I have purposely abstained from saying anything to-day. I have endeavoured to fix your attention on the preliminary fact, that there is such a spot framed out from the great flux of Time as this “ now,” this which we improperly call Time Present. We have seen in how many ways this may be pre-

sented to the mind : we have tried to show you the immense import of the fact for all of us.

And so we have just introduced our main subject. There is this bright platform on which we stand, and on which revealed light shines. In continuing the subject, we will set ourselves to describe and to analyze that beam of light thus shed down upon us from God's throne.

Meantime, may the disposition be given us to approach this matter as honest and earnest men ; not afraid of truth wherever it may be found, and determined, when it is found, to cast ourselves into it at any cost, and with all our powers.



SERMON II.





## II.

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God [now are we children of God], and it doth not yet appear [never yet was manifested] what we shall be.”—I JOHN iii. 2.

**I**N beginning the treatment of the subject brought before us by this text, I dwelt last Sunday on the short word “now.” I endeavoured to show the unreality, strictly speaking, of the idea of time present, and to make it plain that all attempts to represent it to our minds are only made for the sake of fixing and insulating, for our thoughts to contemplate, a certain portion of that time which in reality never stays by us, but is always flowing on. The portion



thus held back for us in the text is, we saw for individuals, our life here on earth : for the entire body of which we are members, the whole course of the Church—*i. e.*, the duration of this current dispensation and world. And finally I took occasion to remark that the fact of a certain portion of our existence being thus designated as “now,” and declared to be known and clear, “now are we,” in contrast to the great unknown future, “it doth not yet appear what we shall be,”—invests this present manifested and known portion with immense importance. What it is which is known and revealed about it, must be for us all a most weighty consideration, bearing on all that unknown future which lies before us.

And so to-day, in going further into this subject, we come to consider what it is which is so plain and manifest with regard to

individuals during this their lifetime ; and with regard to the whole Church during the lifetime of this world. It is thus stated for us : “ *now are we the sons,*” more properly, “ *now are we children,*” “ of God.”

Now, in devoting many Sundays to this subject, it is my main object, not to keep re-asserting to you truths which as Christians we confess, but to enter, somewhat tediously I fear, but still I hope not altogether unprofitably, into the grounds of our receiving those truths, and the elements of which they are made up. We live, unhappily or happily,—but either way for our profit in using the fact,—in days when, more perhaps than in any other days that have been, we are required to give an account to ourselves and to others of that which we believe ; and we who are set here to teach, should be grievously neglecting our duties,

if we did not endeavour to lay the foundations and set forth the elements of our belief in considerations which may be plain and, if possible, convincing to our people. Years ago, it might have been unnecessary to deal with truth in this manner ; and a preacher who dwelt on the first principles of Christian doctrine might be accused of dealing with his people as if they were heathens. But now, the case is widely altered ; and a preacher in these days who does not this, is wanting in the most important part of his appointed work. For now, not only are the great articles of our Christian faith called in question and mistrusted by the world without ; but, whatever may be the case with our regular flocks, in every mixed congregation there are many who come to church and sit through the service without any hearty belief of the

truths which are sounding about them. And, by way of remedying this evil, we see men of our own order pursuing the very way to make unbelief universal and triumphant—adopting exaggerated statements of high and mysterious doctrines, carrying out those statements into practice with the excitement of pompous ritual and vestment, and insanely denouncing all those who go not with them into all these excesses—insanely, I say ; for surely to do this is to imperil faith itself, to load and fasten down, so to speak, the very safety-valves of our belief, and to prevent the simple soul from walking humbly, because honestly, with its God. Far more wisely have those acted, in our estimation, who have descended, for the time and for the time's work, down to where the doubter stood, and have gently taken his hand and led him upwards to faith.

In our present course of sermons, this will be our method and aim ; and it is to testify that part of it which is before us to-day, that I have made these remarks.

We stand, then, on this bright illuminated platform of the present—this sunny promontory in the midst of the dark infinite ocean ; and what is the light upon us which is said to be so clear ? “ Now are we children of God : ” children of God. We are here introduced to a Being above us—a Being from whom we are said to have sprung, in some sense hereafter to come under consideration. Who, and what, is this Being ? How can we know anything of Him ? How can we be sure that He exists at all ? And it is not an idle thing to ask these questions. Judging from the books of the day, judging from the talk of the day, it would appear that the civilized

world is getting very uncertain, or, to use a better word because one invented to express the very character of these times, very shaky, as to the persuasion of there being a God. Not that the term has ceased to be used. All grandeur would be lost out of language and thought, if God were never mentioned. It would be taking away the music of all eloquence, the keystone of all reasoning, the heart of all charity, the last appeal of all persuasion. The world keeps the idea in a fashion—keeps the convenient majestic word, but discards the Person meant by it. All things, we are told, are ruled, not by a Person, but by laws—rigid laws ; and the further we inquire, the more rigid and invariable we find those laws to be, and the less likelihood do we discover of anything like personal action. And, seek we never so far, we are assured that



we cannot find within human experience any credible instance of these rigid natural laws being broken through by personal agency. And so out of these materials a battery is built up against the citadel of our faith. It is scornfully and triumphantly shouted forth over against us, that to believe in one supreme personal will, creating, ruling, guiding, is a state of mind proved to be childish, and no longer tenable by any reasoning being; that to imagine any wish or prayer of ours, even supposing such a Being to exist, capable of reaching or influencing Him, is utterly preposterous; and so on, and so on.

The further we examine, say they—— Well, suppose we do not examine quite so far. Suppose we begin with something very simple indeed. Of these rigid, invariable natural laws, there is none so

familiar to us as the law of gravitation—the law by which the earth is held in its orbit, and by which a stone falls to the ground. This is a rigid invariable law, operating everywhere by a rule of known and unaltered proportion of force to distance. When I see a stone fall, I see a law operate with which I am told no personal will can interfere. But suppose I put out my hand, and intercept that stone? Suppose, when that stone is lying at rest on the ground, I stoop and take it up? What is done then? Let us observe narrowly, for it is very important to our present purpose. This law of gravitation, which was said to be so universal and invariable, is interfered with. And how? By another fixed law? No. There is nothing to compel me to put out my hand, or to stoop and pick up the stone. These fixed and invariable laws of nature



are interfered with by the action of something altogether independent of them—by the will of a person, exercised not by any fixed law at all, but purely at the pleasure of a person. So that here we have at once, and have in our commonest every day experience, a different agency from the laws of nature, bound by none of those laws, and acting on them from a superior height.

And we have thousands and millions of such agents acting upon the whole of nature here on earth. Nor are agents of a similar kind wanting in other orders of being than our own. The animals beneath us, though they may not have personality, have will, and the power to act on nature in common with ourselves. If the stone be taken up by a dog, it is just as much an interference with the law of gravity, and

by that—viz., life—which is above and independent of matter.

So that every day's experience introduces us into another world, which is not ruled by, or is only in part ruled by, these laws supposed invariable and unalterable. Now let us look for a moment at this new world, which has thus dawned upon us. Here is personal will, or the imitation of it ; will, in its higher or its lower forms, acting in spite of, interfering with, treating as though they were not, these unalterable laws which are supposed to rule all things. Have we, having made this discovery, any right to stop with man and ascend no higher ? Is it not more than probable that the orders of being go on ascending ? that in those recesses of nature which it is not given to our eye to see, personal will has even more power than we see it to have in our own

experience? At all events, we have gained thus much by our inquiry. We have found that there is a something capable of interfering with and suspending the laws of nature at its own pleasure. So that when we ask ourselves, as every thinking mind does ask itself, what can first have originated these wonderful natural laws which we see in operation around us, one answer only is possible for us. We know of one agency and of one only which is superior to these laws; and that is, the will of a Person. These laws, this order of things, did not spring up self-established. A law has no power over itself; and matter has no function but to obey law. Something originated, something upholds, the world and all that is therein. And every day's experience teaches us that that something must be the will and the action of a Person;

so that creating and upholding power is not an old wife's fable, to be thrown off as soon as our race is out of its childhood, but is the inevitable verdict of our daily experience. And the same reasoning only wants carrying one step further, to show us that the will of one Supreme Person must have brought about and must uphold this whole universe of matter and of spirit. It is a remarkable thing, that in the old heathen world, while the popular superstitions gave a deity to every stream and tree, the moment any reflecting mind began to exercise its powers, this whole fabric of gods many and lords many disappeared, and it stood forth as the judgment of the thinking human mind, that there was one God, ruler of heaven and earth.

But let us now consider where we stand in our own argument. The will of a Person

is the only intelligible origin of this world and of ourselves ; because that agency is the only one which we know that is not subject to the laws by which matter is bound.

Now, this one great point being granted, many others follow from it. If it was the will of that Supreme Being to create—if it is His present will to uphold, the universe, then we can judge of His character by the laws which He has established and keeps in working. We see those laws calculated to promote and to conserve order, life, happiness, beauty. He is, then, a Being who loves and approves these : who wills order, life, happiness, beauty, in His creation.

But more than this : there are laws in our own minds and spirits, as fixed and invariable as those which act on matter ;

and by the character of these also we may judge of His character who ordained them. In our own spirits there is no rest in evil. However evil may, by the perversion of our nature, have become our habit, it is not and cannot be our nature. The testimony even of the most depraved heart is, that we were first made good and tending to good. And He who made us willed that we should be good. If you ask at once, Why then are we not? the answer, though it may not exhaust the difficulty of the subject, is in itself a very easy one. It might be essential to personal action, that the will should be left free and not tied to any particular direction—even be that the direction of happiness and goodness. But this consideration belongs rather to a further stage of our present subject.

We stand, then, at this point: we find



ourselves living a present life, the nature and purpose of which is known, as contrasted with a future which is unknown; and in this life, thus known and evident, we find ourselves in contact with and in relation with the great Author of our being and upholder of our life—even God. Now this is the point which I would press upon you during the remainder of my sermon; not to-day what that relation is, which will occupy us next time, but that on this platform of the present life we have two parties brought together—ourselves and God.

Now, if we were able to show last Sunday that the marking out of this spot, “now,”—for a relation known and acting on the great unknown future,—invests the present life with very solemn importance, surely that importance will be vastly enhanced when we reflect in what presence

and company we here find ourselves. Here we stand, on the shore and platform of life, each with his own personal being and welfare a matter for himself alone—each in this matter absolutely insulated from all around him, but not one of us alone. Into every heart looks an eye from which none can escape. There is one mind from which none can keep my secrets. One is with each of us, to whom we stand in a known relation now ; and this known relation, during this small framed-off portion of time, is to open out into some great unknown relation in the vast future. It is as if for one hour we were walking with a king or a mighty ruler, and on the intercourse of that hour depended the preferment or the degradation of a whole life. In that case, we might indeed mar our prospects by our anxiety ; we might, from want of presence



of mind, fail to do justice to ourselves ; but it cannot be that any one of us, under such circumstances, would forget where he was and who was by.

And yet this is what the greater part of mankind do in this their present life. They go on day and night, and never think of the awful Presence around them. Nay, not only this, but they give themselves all imaginable pain and trouble to forget that it is around them. They are their own masters, forsooth : their thoughts are their own. Or, if they do not exactly take it in this way, they reason themselves out of the belief in a Personal God, to whom they are responsible, and so lose the dignity as well as the safeguard of a life led in the company and under the eye of God.

They lose the safeguard of such a life ; for did you never notice what a safeguard

against overpowering evil in almost any mind, is the sense of a presence, even of a fellow-creature? There are some thoughts that we dare not think when any one is in the room. The eye of a child, and even the eye of a dumb creature, keeps a man from being quite what he is when alone. And if such be the very instinct of our nature, is it not planted in us for this very purpose, to give all possible influence to the sense of the presence of God, where that sense is active in the mind? If we dare not launch out into forbidden trains of thought when an eye which we love is roving through our chamber, what blessed safety against untold temptation might not an abiding sense of God's presence ensure us!

And they lose also the dignity of such a life. Have you ever travelled as the dawn of a bright day was waxing onward—the

place of every object more and more indicated, but a dimness over all—the reaches of the rivers faintly reddening through the mist—the trees and the hills massed together in indistinctness, groups of forms, but without the life of detail? And then on the sudden as you look, here and there beams of brightness leap forth—the hill sides glow with rosy light, the rocks burn like molten metal—living fire looks forth from the streams, and heaven and earth rejoice because the sun is risen.

Even such, my brethren, is the change when the presence of God arises upon the inner life of a man. All things were seen before, but dimly and in their outlines; but now they are full of clearness and light. Before, he walked in uncertainty, not sure of friend or foe: now, his path is plain before him; there is a voice which

says, "This is the way, walk thou in it." Before, he was a degraded creature, a crippled creature, a half-witted man: now, now first, he has put on the dignity of his nature, and is fulfilling the ends of his nature.

And we must repeat, what we have often said before, that the greatest difference between man and man is to be found interposed between those who regard this presence of God and those who regard it not. There are great differences between those who do regard it—as to truth in their conceptions of Him, as to knowledge of His revelation of Himself, as to the extent of their surrender of themselves to His will; but it appears to me that none of these differences are so great as that between a man, I care not in what age or country or with what extent of knowledge, who

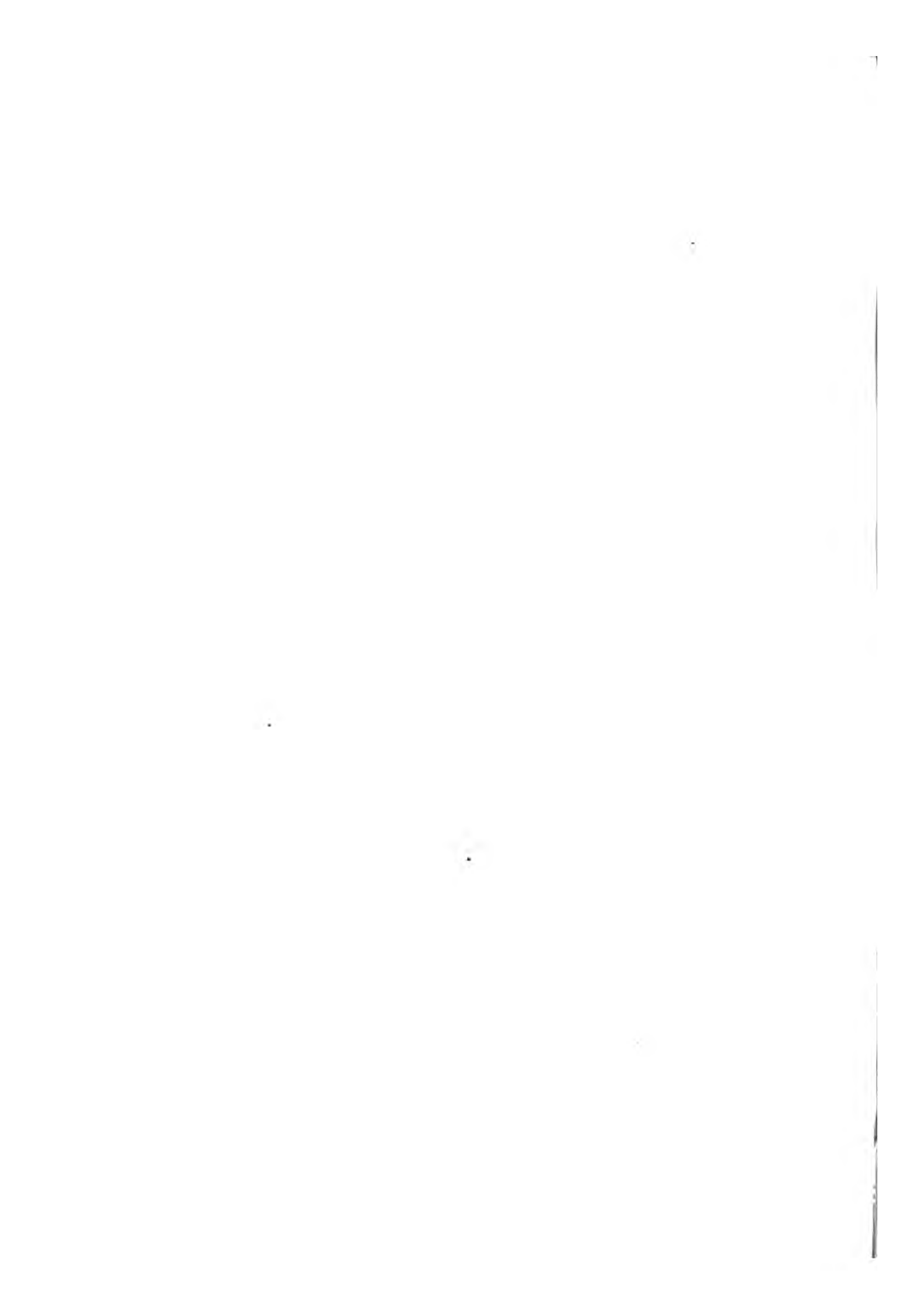
lives without God, and a man who regards Him in His thoughts and ways.

But when we speak of God, we have to remember that He in our minds is not the mere offspring of our reasoning powers, though they, unassisted, might lead us to some idea of Him. He has revealed Himself to mankind. Though no man hath seen Him at any time, there is one who hath declared Him to us. And it is in virtue of our connection with His only-begotten Son that it is able to be said, "Now are we children of God." The nature and the tenure of this relationship will occupy the two remaining sermons of our first four. If we have seemed to-day to be keeping off from Christian ground, and studiously thrusting back revealed truth out of view, the reason is most apparent—viz., that we are [as yet building

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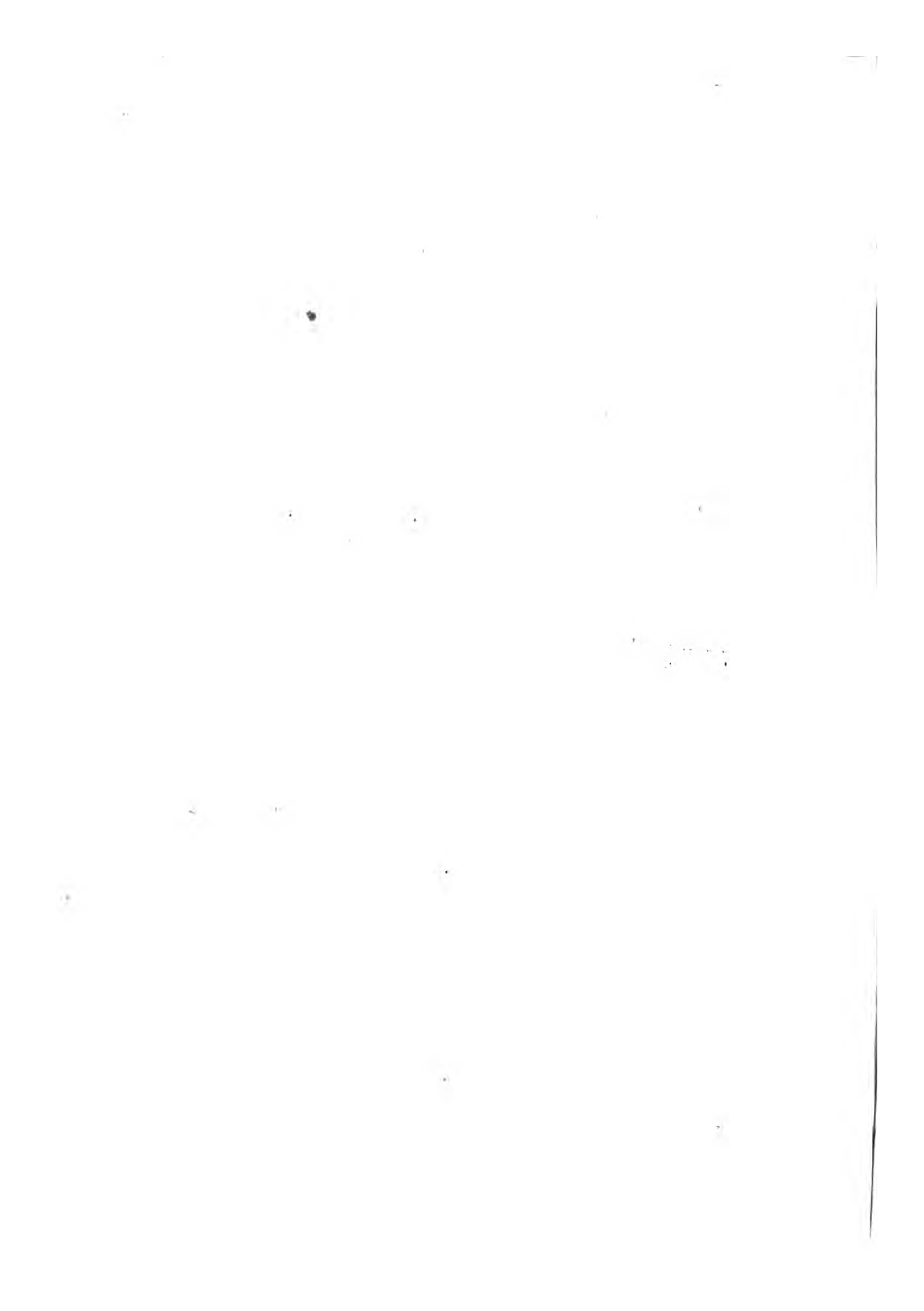
the way for such considerations to enter in their full force. Had we many hours to speak, all might be included in one discourse ; but as we have not, we must so portion out our subject as not to neutralize the propriety of one part by prematurely bringing in another.





SERMON III.







### III.

“ Beloved, now are we the sons of God [now are we children of God].”—I JOHN iii. 2.

**T**HUS far have we come. There is a clearly defined portion of the passing course of time marked out for us, and spoken of as “now.” During this portion, we find ourselves in connection with and relation to a great Supreme Being, who made us and all. And this connection and relation is not an obscure one, but a very plain one: “now are we,” as a matter known and evident; “it doth not yet appear,” or, “it hath never been manifested, what we shall be.” We cannot put

the contrast too strongly between this present and this future, this known and this unknown. The lessons to be drawn from both will derive much of their force from the sharpness of this contrast. Let us recall them, as far as they have gone, and before we advance further.

We said that this marking off with plainness and distinctness of a certain portion of time, tends to give immense importance to our present life, as a something revealed to us for a special purpose, and that purpose the preparation for that great unmeasured unknown which is to come. And we found, that as we went on to inquire *what it is* which is revealed to us concerning this present life, this solemn meaning and preciousness of it was still further enhanced. For it appeared to begin with the fact that we here find our-

selves, as regards our inmost lives, alone with the great and good Being who made us and brought us into relationship with Him.

We have to-day and next Sunday to inquire what that relationship is. "Now are we children of God?" Now it must be plain to any of you with very little consideration, that the Apostle could not here mean the absolutely general relationship which exists between the great Father and all His creatures. To this there is no exception; all men, and all living things, may in this sense be said to be God's children; and the assertion of this fact would lead to no consequences with regard to the future, such as are here implied. It is true we might say, "All creatures are in this present state linked to God as their Creator, and we cannot pronounce upon

any new conditions in which it may please Him to place them in any other state ;” but that would not be to say what is said here. Here, as we hope to see more clearly further on, there is no doubt expressed as to whether there is or is not another state in which we shall be ; that is taken for granted. It is only said to be uncertain what our condition will be when we reach that other state. So that, by the very terms, this relation in which we stand to God, and expressed by the words “children of God,” is one in which such a future existence is assured to us. Now this is not assured to man in his natural state ; so that we are here treating of a state beyond and above nature—a new state, in which we are brought into some different relation to God from that which we held to Him by the mere tie of our creation.

As by that we were, in some sense, His children, so by this we are His children in another and a more blessed sense. So that this of which we speak may well be called a new creation.

That this is really the meaning in our text, may be shown in a moment by noticing St. John's way of speaking throughout this Epistle. For example, he describes various qualities of mind and habits of life by which we may ascertain whether we are the children of God or not, which we could not do unless this being born of Him were something over and above our natural state, of which all partake. We find him affirming that love to God and to man is a test and sign of this new birth having taken place. Again, that it is necessarily accompanied by freedom from the practice and love of sin. Again, that

it is a characteristic of all that is thus born, to overcome the world. And these signs point, beyond a doubt, to that portion of our being in, and in virtue of which, this new birth takes place. It is clearly a matter not of the body but of the spirit. It has respect to thoughts and motives and habits, not to the outward man merely, but to that which animates and moves the outward man—the springs of action within.

And having advanced thus far in its description, we may now ask ourselves of what kind it is, and how it takes place. A birth of the body all can understand. Having been knit together by the wonderful power of God, it then first begins an independent and self-sustained life—begins to be, what it was not before, a living body. Are we then to understand that this inward



change is at all of the same kind? Clearly we are, or this particular word would not have been used to describe it. Mere change of a few opinions, mere alteration of some of a man's habits, could not be characterized by such a name as "birth;" nor could any improvement which might result in consequence be called a "new life." We must seek for something very much more than this, at all to fulfil the conditions of such a term. To make it plain to you, my brethren, we must go back to the composition of this our human nature, as revealed to us in Scripture.

We never can be too often reminded, because it is necessary to the properly comprehending of almost every truth regarding us, that man is composed of three parts—body, soul, and spirit. In our ordinary talk, a confusion is prevalent on this head,



and we make this three-fold division a two-fold one. We speak of body and soul as making up the man. Nay often, indeed generally, we mean right when we thus speak; we intend by the word *body* to describe all our material part, and by the word *soul* to describe all our immaterial part. But here, in this latter description, is the confusion and the mistake. It may be seen in a moment thus: put the question to yourselves, Wherein do we differ from the brutes? They have a material part in many examples very closely resembling our own; in all, of a similar though varied organization. They have also an immaterial part, a living something which animates and directs the body, the seat of all their animal desires and emotions, and of whatever intelligence or sagacity they may possess. In both these respects they

resemble us in kind, and the only difference between us and them is in degree only. Our bodily organization may be more perfect than theirs, but it is of the same kind, and only differs in combining and perfecting many advantages which they possess separated and scattered over many different tribes. Our mental organization may be almost immeasurably superior to theirs; but, for aught we see as yet, it only differs in this superiority, not in its very nature. We can trace in their minds processes which, though they are but elementary, and darkly and clumsily conducted, yet are precisely analogous to processes in our own minds. The steps, few indeed and simple, and applied rather instinctively than consciously,—by which the faithful dog exercises the sagacity which saves a human life, are the very same steps—sound

in suggestion and in application—by which we should consciously, and with more directly applied power, exercise the same sagacity and arrive at the same result. Is there then no difference in kind between ourselves and these lower animals? No one surely would maintain this in the face of all the evident signs to the contrary. And what are the signs to the contrary? Not our powers over nature, nor the triumphs which we achieve by their means; not our books, nor our schools, nor our capacities for business; nor, in a word, any one thing that belongs to our actions and achievements in this present world. All these are but results of our difference in degree. Give any of the more intelligent races among them the advantages that we have combined in ourselves, and they too could achieve any of these things. Many

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of them already surpass us in the beauty and perfection of the structures which they build; and for our triumphs over nature we are in many instances indebted to their superior muscular power. As far as this present world is concerned, we and they are but the higher and lower members of one great family, all alike in having a bodily and a mental organization. The two parts, body and soul, are common to all animated nature. Not in strength, not in intelligence, does the difference lie between man and beast; but in the fact that man possesses an altogether different and altogether superior third part, besides body and soul, which none of them possesses. And this third component part of man is known in Holy Scripture, and known among those who have inquired into these matters, as man's spirit. It may be

perhaps best understood by saying that, describing roughly, it is to our soul what the soul is to the body. Were it not for the soul, the body would be mere matter—organized, indeed, but inanimate, as in the plant. The soul, by its higher capacities and desires, ennobles and exalts the body. In the soul resides personality ; in the soul resides present responsibility. But the soul as much wants ennobling and raising in its turn as does the body. And this is done by the third and higher part of man—the spirit.

Let us look somewhat into this matter: let us spend a few minutes in inquiring into the nature of this our highest and noblest part.

We have no evidence that any order of being below our own has any consciousness of God. It is the part of our

being in which this consciousness resides, which is called in Scripture, and known among ourselves, as the spirit of man. We all know what this is, in a rough way. We may know very much more if we choose to think about it. Look over the world—its history, its advances. Some nations seem to be almost without this consciousness of God at all. Others have preserved it faintly. Others have it in more intensity, but have allowed it to be in union with and subjection to a system of gross and carnal indulgences and motives. Others have it in the more purified form which is the result of the revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Of these last, a large proportion have debased it again by uniting with it a degraded material theory of the presence of Christ and the partaking of Him in the



Sacrament ; and have so far entered into a compromise with the lower influences of the body, which has disturbed the pure influence of the consciousness of God. Others, again, have repudiated and protested against this degenerate Christianity, and have returned in profession to the faith as once for all delivered. Now, of all these, to which division has mankind been most indebted for advance in all that ennobles and blesses our race? Where is the upward tendency most at work? Where is the individual life of man, where is the family life, most under the influence of purity, and truth and peace? Where are the most unreserved confidences, the fewest intrigues, the most singleness of purpose? If these questions admit of but one answer, if it be undeniable that where the gospel of Jesus Christ is professed in

its original integrity, there, despite of a thousand blemishes,—which become by that very profession more evident to view,—is also found all that raises, that ennobles, that blesses humanity, then is the connection between the loftiest destinies of our nature and the consciousness of God, as God really is, also manifest and undeniable.

But if this third and noblest part of man be really in our nature as God made it, how comes it to pass that it does not act in all of us, and draw us up to God and to good? The answer to this question, my brethren, is to the mere worldly man impossible; to the Christian believer, matter of perfect ease. We believe that man was thus created, with this threefold chord in perfect harmony. But he was not created a machine. An essential part of personal



being is the will—the power of turning to and from a proposed course of action. Without the freedom of this, there is no responsibility—there is no right and wrong. And if this be so, then it is also an essential part of any worthy course of personal being, that there should be trial made of the will. We believe that man's will was tried. We receive the simple story in full consciousness of all that it involves ; and we maintain, not in superstition, but in the full light of modern science and the full exercise of our reasoning powers, that it, and no other solution that ever has been given, accounts for and describes the present state of the three-fold nature of man. Man was tried ; man fell. *What* man was tried, *what* man fell,—though it is set before us that one particular man fell, and did, by his very position, involve us all in

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his fall,—need not be dwelt upon now. That which happened was not individual, but was generic. The will of man, not merely the will of a man, turned aside from the obedience of God, the higher object of man's spirit, and became bent downward to the lower desires of the soul and of the body—selfish ambition and selfish appetite. Now,—for do not let us stray out of our way,—what has been the effect of this Fall on that of which we are speaking? It has affected every part of us more or less. We cannot tell how much the perfect organization of the body may have been impaired by it. We cannot altogether tell; but we can better tell how much the powers and faculties of the soul have been weakened and deranged by it; but this we can say beyond all doubt—that while the Fall has impaired man's

body and man's mind, it has ruined man's spirit—man's natural consciousness of God and upward course to him. This part of man's nature is left by it desolate—as good as extinct; so that men, living according to their mere nature, are spoken of in Holy Scripture as not having a spirit at all. All the faculties and powers that belonged to this higher part of man are, in such persons, dormant, and as it were gone. They have lost all desire for God, and for good as such. They live intent on the mere things of this world. To satisfy bodily appetite, to ensure bodily comfort, to push upward in the present life—these are their highest aims. Anything above these—any religious acts—God's service, God's worship—hope for another life—are to them absolutely distasteful and disgusting. They turn from them with

loathing—with the loathing of the fevered and morbid appetite for wholesome and delicious food. Man's spirit is dead, and the power of self-recovery is gone. As the electric spark cannot travel along a line away from which the wire is bent, as the water which flows down one limb of a stream which has parted cannot follow the other, so man's will, having once become deflected from the path of God, cannot return back and take its former direction. That noblest part of man has fallen into disease, and become like a withered limb or a decayed branch. Take men out of the great highway or market of the world, put to them, one after another, the simplest questions belonging to the life and works of the spirit of man, what will be the result? Blank amazement, puzzled vacancy, or, it may be, scornful amusement.

They know nothing of it ; they don't half believe in its existence ; they treat it as an idle dream ; they defy you to prove it to their satisfaction. As little can one who has never learned figures, follow a difficult problem in mathematics, as the mere worldly man can comprehend the interests, the activities, the processes, the organism, nay, the very existence, of the spiritual, the Godward part of man.

And yet, "now are we children of God." Now have our spirits become, by some grand and glorious process or other, alive again to God, endued with His very nature, adopted into His family. What this grand and glorious process has been, how it is wrought out in the soul and body of each man in whom the life of the spirit is re-awakened and bent on its course,—this part of our subject will, if God please,

occupy us next Sunday. Suffice it for the present, that the fact is before us. We could not be children of God, in the sense here intended, without such a new birth, without the entrance of new life into this withered and paralysed noblest portion of us.

And as we have each time parted with some familiar thoughts, calculated to dwell on our minds, and, if it may be, to bring forth fruit for good, let us this time press upon you, with regard to our present place in our argument, but still in all its Christian fulness of consequence, this possession of the new birth and the new life, of which we have been speaking. "Now are we children of God." What a position to stand in, and to what a Father! The recovered, the adopted, the chosen children of Him that made heaven and earth—not



destined for, not to end in, this world, but with God's heavenly abode for our Father's house, God's throne for our family centre, the light unapproachable in which He dwelleth pointing out our distant home across the dark waste of life! Oh, what manner of men ought we to be! How pure, how earnest, how bound in love to our Father, and our brothers and sisters in this blessed family! "Now are we God's children"—not children of vanity, not children of greediness, not children of selfishness. The light that shines so clearly on our platform is none of these lurid glares which dazzle and bewilder—the one thing which we know, the one thing which in certain solemn hours that are coming we shall only care to know, is "now are we children of God." For in the blessedness of this knowledge is all the happiness of

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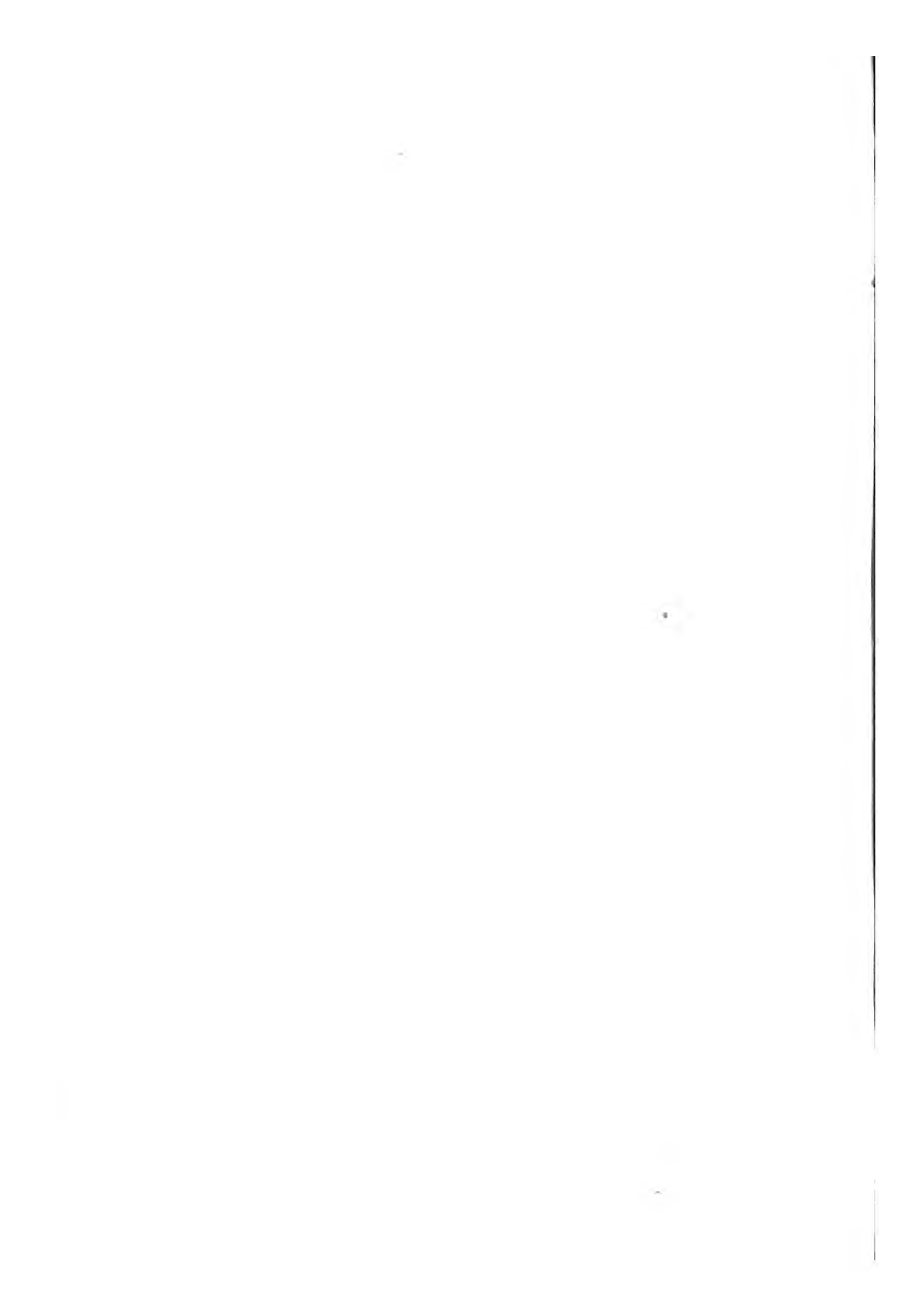
life present, and in the trust which this knowledge gives is all the hope for the great non-apparent future.







SERMON IV.





#### IV.

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be.”—I JOHN iii. 2.

NOW are we children of God. In this our present state, thus clearly marked off as known, in contrast to a future that is unknown, we find ourselves with the great Being who has made us, and brought into a special relation with Him, known here as that of His children. We saw last Sunday that this description, “*Children of God,*” cannot be referred to our having been created by Him ; for that this would be no distinguishing privilege, and would not, moreover, answer to the terms in

which St. John here and elsewhere in this Epistle, speaks of the relation.

We followed some of those descriptions, and found reason to believe that this relationship to God has place, not in our bodily part, not in that animal soul which we possess in common with all that breathes, but in that other and higher part of us which Holy Scripture, in its way of speaking about man, calls our spirit. We then spent some time in endeavouring to make clear to you what this spirit is—that it is that part of man in which his consciousness of God—that part which, before he fell, was in its proper place and dignity, guiding and ruling both the animal soul and the material body ; but that since the fall it has been deposed from its high place, which has been usurped by the animal soul or mind, more or less

under the guidance of selfish appetites and passions arising from the body. But we saw that a state of revival of man's spirit is spoken of in this Epistle and elsewhere in Holy Scripture, in which man has recovered his consciousness of God, and has renewed the special relation of adoption into God's family. This fact was before us, and that was all. We reserved for this, our concluding sermon on the former portion of the text, the work of explaining how this relation is brought about and sustained. No subject could well be more appropriate to this particular Sunday, when we read in our Epistle of that title of our blessed Redeemer which does in fact carry the explanation of which we are in search wrapped up within it, and in our Gospel of that power of His exerted in this great miracle of creating food for

men's bodies, by which, as He afterwards explained, He signified the nature of that spiritual food,—even Himself,—wherewith the life of men's spirits is nourished.

First, then, in speaking of this new life which the love of the Father hath bestowed on men, we observe that new life begins with new birth. Not only is this an inference of our own, though it would be a very just one, even if nothing more were revealed about it, but Holy Scripture asserts the fact again and again in precise terms, that a new birth is absolutely necessary to the spiritual life. Our Lord's own words would be enough to show this; for never, of course, were more sacred and decisive words, and never were words more plainly and unmistakably expressed. "Except a man be born again [or, anew, or, afresh], he cannot enter into the kingdom

of God," *i. e.*, according to the well-known meaning of these last words, cannot be a Christian, cannot be one of those on whom the love of the Father has bestowed the state of children of God. So that this is very clear, that the new life of man's spirit must begin with a new birth. And about the meaning of this there need be no mistake.

When Nicodemus, to whom our Lord was speaking, either mistook or pretended to mistake the kind of birth meant, and put the question, "Can a man enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" our Lord, while He cleared up the mistake about the kind of birth meant, did not at all hint that any mistake had been made as to the fullest application of the idea of birth to the matter in hand. He did not reply, What I intended was,



except a man greatly change his views of God and himself, he cannot see the kingdom of God. But He repeated His expressions, giving it now its proper reference to the spirit of man, and setting forth both the symbol by which it is conveyed and the agent by whom it is brought about—  
“Verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

The Apostle Peter, again, addressing Christian people, says of them, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, even the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.”

And the Apostle James in like manner, “Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruit of His creatures.”

From these texts, to which others might

have been added of a similar kind, we see that the birth into the life of God's children is, as we might suppose, His act ; is brought about in the spirit of man by the agency of the word of truth ; and is also effected in some manner by water. All this is contained in the plain words which I have quoted to you.

Let us spend our time to-day in examining first this new birth, and then the nature of the relation into which we are brought by it.

Man is found in the state into which our race has come by the fall, a state of deadness as to the life of the noblest part of him viz., his spirit ; " following the desires of the flesh and of the mind," as the Scripture expresses it. How does the word of truth, how does God's Spirit, act on such an one, so that the new birth

takes place within him? Before we answer, let us ask another question. What part has God's Spirit in such a man? How has he connection with or relation to God at all? God's Spirit is holy—he is unholy: clean and pure, whereas he is impure. It is manifest something must be wrought whereby he may be brought near to God, and a union between the two made possible. Communion of spirits is not a thing which can take place between enemies or between those of wholly different natures. There must, in order for this, be a community at least of nature: there must be common ground whereon God and the sinful man may meet and hold intercourse. How would this be, if our nature had been in some manner brought near to God by One who partook both of His nature and ours?

How if there be One who is ours because He bears upon Him our nature as man, and God's because He is of the Divine nature—One who may claim, without presumption, to be equal with God? But how might this be? Surely, it might be said, the very idea is monstrous; for does it not involve the same impossibility which was just now mentioned, that God, pure and holy, should have become united to man, impure and unholy? Wait a moment; let us not pronounce so hastily. Sin—impurity—is, it is true, a condition in which we are born and find ourselves, and no individual man can be found free from it; but is it a necessity of humanity itself? Are we going to say that there cannot be a man at all without sin? Adam was without sin: Adam was as really man as we are. Why, if the requi-

site conditions were fulfilled, might there not be another Adam, having upon him our nature in its fulness, of essential qualities, but not having upon him that sin which is a mere accident of our nature? Why should not God enter into our nature, actually and in its fulness, but at the same time take it upon Him in its spotlessness and freedom from sin? Why should not the human nature of such a Divine Person be the new man, created of God in righteousness and true holiness? But if this were so, notice what follows. This Son of God, also being Son of man, is not merely one among the sons of men, whose course will pass away with Himself and affect nobody except Himself; but He is a new righteous Head of our whole nature, and all that He does passes on to His brethren in the human nature, who are all

one in Him because He has taken them into Himself. All that He does, passes on to us,—includes us in its act and in its consequences. And so, bearing us upon Him, He offered Himself a sacrifice for sin,—for our sin, not His own; for the sins, the sin, all in one, of the human nature which He bore upon Him. I do not see, I never could see, any step in this plain account of what the Son of God has done for us in the nature of man, which will not bear the strictest examination by the acutest reason of man. All seems to me to hold together, and to bring about that of which we are in search,—that there should be a middle man, a Mediator, between the pure God, and impure man; Himself God, Himself man; the bearer of our sin and the taker away of it in the sight of God; the re-introducer of fallen



man into the family and under the blessed fatherhood of God. Now, it is no longer difficult to see how the Holy Spirit of God may hold communion with the spirit of man. Our righteous Head, the Lord our righteousness, is endowed with that Spirit without measure, and has bestowed Him as a gift to men. In Him, and on the common ground of His humanity, the Divine Spirit speaks with our spirits. In Him is a new creation, in which, as of old, the Spirit of God moves over the face of the dark and formless waters.

And now we can go forward with our inquiry, How does the new birth of man take place by the agency of God's Spirit in Christ? Over the wide world, to all nations (such is His command), goes the glad message, "Christ in you, the hope of glory,"—the message which makes known

man's disease and God's remedy. The effects of this proclamation—this good spell, or gospel—going forth upon the world are two-fold. It acts upon the individual heart, and it acts upon men as a society.

It reawakens the dead spirit of him who hears, and it brings about a society or body of men in which this new condition may be put upon men by stated ordinances and a prescribed covenant. "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit," said our blessed Lord, "he cannot see the kingdom of God." What He meant by the former of these terms, He Himself explained to us when He prescribed an ordinance by which all nations should be made His disciples. He has ordained that rite of baptism, speaking with His own mouth; and He has appointed it to be the symbol and ordinary vehicle of the new



birth; insomuch that St. Paul, writing to Titus, calls the vessel in which the water for baptism was contained, "the laver or *font* of the new birth."\* It is strange, considering how very plain Holy Scripture is on the point, that the doctrine of regeneration in baptism should ever have been made matter of question within the Church of Christ, or regarded as a tenet distinguishing any one party in the Church from another. It is wonderful how any Christian, reading his Bible, can make common cause with the unbeliever in scoffing at a doctrine to which both our Lord Himself and His apostles stand so plainly

\* The publishers cannot issue this volume without expressing their dissent from the doctrine of baptismal regeneration taught in the above paragraph. They sought the consent of the Editor as to its omission, but in deference to the memory of the author it was deemed best that the work of the late Dean should remain unaltered.

committed. And it will be equally strange when we consider the nature of the case itself. What is *birth*? The beginning of life; but not the vigour of life—not the waxing onward of life. Great mistakes have been made owing to confounding the new birth unto God with the new life in its activity. A child may be born, but may be without the proper use of its limbs, or its senses, or its faculties. There may be a stunted life, there may be a crippled life, there may be a dormant life; or again, there may be life which expires in a day or in an hour. We speak of our baptized children, in plain terms, as regenerate—born again. We speak of them as being this, because we believe our Bibles, and are not afraid of the cavils of unbelievers. God forbid that we should ever cease thus to speak of them, or that any endeavours of

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unbelief or ignorance should ever succeed in changing that faithful testimony to God's truth; for on this incorporation into Christ's Church by Christ's ordinance rests her whole building up into Him. Well, we declare them regenerate; but to be *born* is not all, as we know; and therefore we are instructed in the service to make our prayer unto God "that this child may lead the rest of his life according to this beginning;" *i. e.*, that the life now implanted may not wither up, may not be inactive, but may grow and flourish, and bring forth fruit unto holiness.

And this new birth in the adult man or woman, is not to be prescribed according to man's fancy any more than in the other case. Persuasion, conviction, repentance, and faith, these may be, these are, its conditions, these may bring the will to the

ordinance, and may be required for the fit partaking of the ordinance ; but it is in the ordinance, and not in these, that the new birth is conveyed. Water and the Spirit, joined by our Lord's own words, cannot be separated by us. If they ever are, the cases are known to Him : He who ordained can dispense, and none other.

Well, then, we are children of God ; we are regenerate, new-born. If the question be asked, as it is sometimes asked in ignorance of the meaning of terms, Can we become unregenerate ? I answer, by putting it in plainer Saxon words, Can the child that has been born become unborn ? Can you annihilate a fact ? The question is nonsense, and never could have been put, had the right meaning of words been kept in mind. Every baptized person is regenerate, and must remain regenerate to

the end of life and beyond it, because nothing can do away with the fact of his new birth in baptism. But, as before, birth is not life, not active life, not continuing life. The dead have all been born ; you cannot make them unborn. Have you, have I, been born unto God? Yes, at the time when we were made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. Are you, am I, living unto God now, at this present moment? Ah, that is a very different question. That depends on the use made by us of His continually offered grace ; and is to be judged of by whether our course is guided by the upward drawings of the life of the spirit, and not by the lower desires of the flesh and of the animal soul.

And this brings us back to our great theme, and to our assertion respecting this

time present, "Now are we children of God." In the Son of His love, who has taken our nature into His Godhead, and has become the Lord our righteousness, He has adopted us into His family, and made us His children. But between various persons among us there is a wide distinction. Some know not of, more care not to know of, this glorious relation between God and themselves. There are among us undutiful children—children disinherited by their own fault, or even their own will—children of whom it must be feared that, in the great final gathering into our Father's house, they may be cast out and disowned. Still it is true of us as a whole—true in the main and general that now we are children of God; that on this portion of the great stream of time known as the present, and designated by



the term *now*, there shines this clear beam of God's love to us, by which He hath bestowed on us a place in His family of spiritual children, and hath given us an inheritance among the saints in light. This we know with the knowledge of faith, of faith resting on evidence, resting on the assured persuasion of those who can render a reason for their hope. Now are we children of God, upheld by the food which He provides for His family, looking for the inheritance of glory. And from this, what follows? What manner of persons ought we to be? This bright spot, of which we know thus much, is all we see; a dark, unknown future extends beyond it. But on this *now* must, in all reason, depend the complexion of that future. Adopted into the Church below, the waiting family of God on earth, that unknown



and unrevealed lot must, in all reason, be a further development of this present state of adoption. How to prepare for it, how so to behave that, whatever it may turn out to be, we may be fitted for it—this must be the great aim and struggle of our lives here. And how can this be brought about, but by honestly and bravely taking up and acting on this our adoption into God's family?—making it, so to speak, the ground beneath our feet, to walk upon and work upon; never thinking of ourselves, nor of our place, nor of our duties, except with reference to this our place in God's family—never thinking of our companions and friends and our fellow-Christians, but as partakers in this inestimable benefit with ourselves? Oh that there were more simple taking for granted of this foundation truth of the baptized man's life—

“Now are we children of God”! What a contrast is it, to think of such a simple living on God’s strength in God’s household, and the low, wretched notion which is too prevalent among us respecting these matters! Shall I too severely characterize this latter if I say that it consists in looking on being religious as a dreary kind of thing, which must come some day when death looms ahead, but which is by all means to be delayed as long as possible? Did not our greatest genius exactly touch this popular notion about things divine, when making one describe the death-bed of an old man whose grey hairs did not keep him from being a fool and jester: “So he cried out, God! God! God! three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid him, he should not think of God: I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with

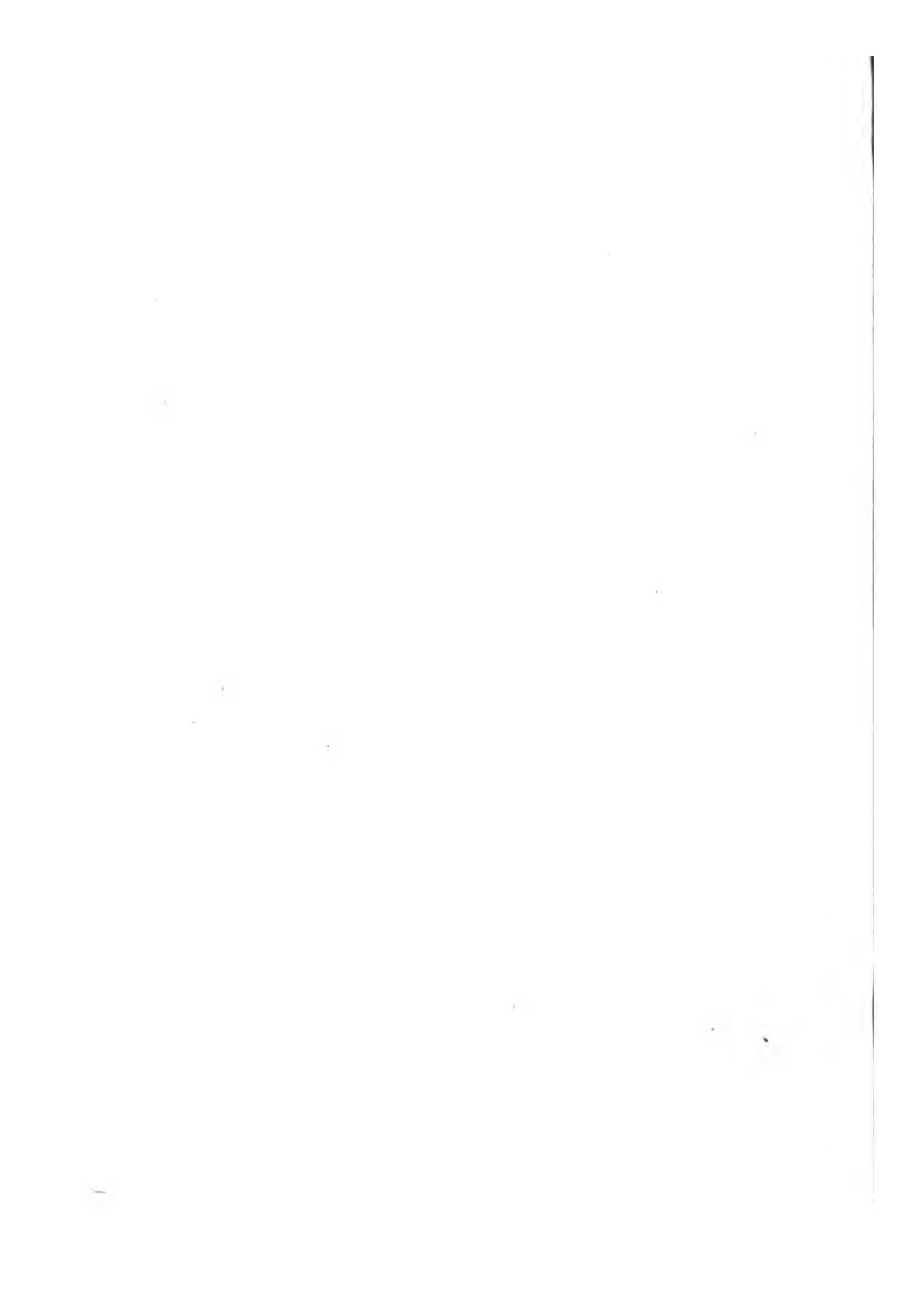
any such thoughts yet?" Oh, set against this the triumphant confession, extending over the whole of this life, "Now are we children of God." How it brightens all life's dark places! how it guards amidst all life's dangers! how it helps the fainting hopes over the mysterious end of life!

So then, my brethren, we have finished our four sermons on the former part of our text. We have done dealing with that which is revealed and plain concerning time present. And we now stand on the verge of the season of Advent, when all thoughts are turned to things yet to come. During that season we hope to devote the same number of sermons to the latter portion of this same text—that great future of which it is said, "it doth not yet appear," or, "it has never yet been manifested, what we shall be."

May God grant that from all these our meditations the result may be, a more simple living upon the great realities of our faith, and in humble daily obedience, as dear children, to the will of our heavenly Father!



SERMON V.





V.

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and *it doth not yet appear what we shall be.*”—I JOHN iii. 2.

**W**E have spoken hitherto of that which is known as time present : that space between the past and the future on which attention is in the former part of this text especially directed, and during which our state is ascertained and clear. *Now*, during this time present, are we children of God? Of this relation to God we have also spoken, and have found it to consist in the new life, in the spirit of consciousness of Him and obedience to Him. The birth into this life is, we saw by the plainest



testimonies of Holy Scripture, brought about in man by the Spirit of God ; and the same testimony showed us that the ordinary bestowal of that Holy Spirit for this new life is in the ordinance of Baptism, which Christ ordained as the means of admission to the privileges of His covenant. So far all was known and clearly marked.

But from this point, a very different subject engages our attention. The text and the season carry our thoughts on to the future. The text, by the words "it doth not yet appear what we shall be": the season, inasmuch as "Advent," or "coming," naturally belongs to that portion of time, in whichever of its possible senses we understand it. The attitude of our minds is entirely altered. Hitherto we have been looking on and examining that bright and revealed platform on which we

stand, and were only conscious of an unrevealed immensity beyond its limits: now, we lift up our eyes and fix them on that undefined world which lies before us. And of it, in its nature, let us first speak.

Time present, I observed in the first of these sermons, has no real existence; but is only, strictly speaking, the point where the past ceases and the future begins. And when we give it a wider meaning, it is, as we saw, merely a loose way of speaking, for the sake of framing out and contemplating together certain portions of time, distinguished by some common attribute, which we know and can affirm of them. Now it is in this, in every one of the senses in which we may use the term "time present," that time future absolutely differs from it, that of time future we know nothing, and can affirm nothing. Nay, I

affirmed too much, when I said, "time future;" for I took for granted the existence in the future of this state of time, not knowing whether it may not be this moment coming to an end. Of *the future*, then, we know nothing. In all the various senses of the present, this is true: we may mean by the present, this instant, which we vainly strive to arrest and contemplate as it flits by us,—and then it is true: of the next instant we know nothing. Whether we may be in life or in death, in health or in pain, here or elsewhere, with whom, how employed—all this we may guess at and surmise, but we cannot assert anything; it has never been manifested what we shall be. And as we advance forward the artificial meaning which we may give to the present, and widen the frame of the picture which

we choose to make our field of view, the same remains true. We may speak of this day, or this year, or this life ; and in each case of another day, another year, another life, it doth not appear, none has ever been able to show us, what shall be, or what we shall be. All that we say of our own minds about another day, another year, another life, is founded on surmise, is true on certain conditions. We assume that what has been will continue to be. "To-morrow we shall rise from our beds as usual,"—to-morrow, taking for granted, that is, that this sequence of day after day continues,—we shall rise as usual, if, that is, this sequence of breath after breath continue uninterruptedly to maintain us in our present vigour. These conditions are summed up by St. James in that one

which contains them all, "If the Lord will." "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and will abide a year, and buy and sell, and get gain : whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow." Instead of saying, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

Surely, my friends, it is a strange and a solemn thing to think of, this standing up against total darkness—this evermore taking steps into an unknown void. And still stranger it is to think that we and this whole race of mankind evermore exist and go onwards under these solemn circumstances, so quietly, so contentedly, so assuredly. It is as if one should march with the edge of a precipice continually receding before him, but uncertain when it would stop, and he should take the step

which should be his fall. On this security, I will not further dwell now: it will be found to do us good service on a future occasion. What I wish to fix your attention upon to-day is, the contrast itself between the known present and the unknown future, as to the special matter which we now have in hand—as to this our present state of being children of God, and the change, whatever it may be, which shall pass upon us in that state hereafter.

And, first of all, you will observe that in these very terms it is taken for granted that there is such a future for us beyond this present life. It is not said, it doth not yet appear “whether we shall be” hereafter, but “what we shall be.” From us, as Christians, thus much of the darkness has been lifted from the future: we know that it will not bring to us annihilation.



Whatever mysterious and unknown change it may bring, we shall live on. This, before Christianity, was indeed a surmise in men's minds, founded on an instinct of our common nature ; but it was reserved for our blessed Lord to lift thus much of the dark veil from the future, as to make our life on the other side an assured fact, never again to be doubted. He was man, and as man went down into death, and returned, and has again resumed the life of that mysterious future condition. As He is, so are we. As we saw last Sunday but one, that which He did passed on to us, and has become ours by virtue of His bearing upon Himself our entire nature as its second and righteous Head. Life and immortality have been by Him brought to light. Still, as to that of which we speak to-day, the manner of change which shall



pass upon us on entering, or in, that other life, the revelation of our certain existence in it has but, so to speak, made the darkness visible : we know that we shall be ; this serves to link on that new state to our own in prospect and in interest. We know not what we shall be : this serves to baffle that interest, and cloud over that prospect. This baffling, this clouding over, is most strongly felt when we have accompanied one who has walked beside us in this life to the very brink of the great precipice, and have witnessed the change, as far as it can on this side be witnessed. This moment, He is with us ; gradually perhaps being withdrawn from us and we from Him ; but still here, in a known state. We minister to His wants, which are familiar to us as being also our own. We can, from the expression of the outward

countenance, guess at what is passing within His thoughts. All is fitly framed together,—the body a temple and an organ of the soul within. Another moment, blankness has gathered over that meaning face; the nerves of sight have ceased to hold in those dilating pupils: the tenement is empty, the inhabitant is gone—whither? We sit and ponder—where is He now? What unknown thoughts, what new faculties, what fresh wants, what untried circumstances has He entered and put on? All is blank, all is absolutely unknown. We, too, shall be like Him before we see Him as He is. And this bar is insurmountable; this veil is impervious. It is the one natural process, which no discovery of man can ever reveal. Not the meaning of the dream only, but the dream itself is hidden from us. Science

has no material before her on which to ground her researches. It never yet was manifested what we shall be.

Does this seem strange to us? It belongs to our present meditation to enter somewhat into the thoughts suggested by this question; because, if we can see the profit of that being hidden which has been hidden, we may another time also see the reason of that being revealed which has been revealed.

First, is it to be supposed that we could know what we shall be—that it could be to us matter of knowledge—that we have faculties to take such a revelation in? We can make some sort of answer to this inquiry, without any positive speculation as to the very thing which is in question. Our present knowledge seems to be bound up with our organized body. We are

simply unable to conceive an existence in separation from it : for such an existence, whatever new fact may be revealed as about to supervene upon it, is necessarily presented to us in thinking of the change. It would seem to us as if the soul going forth into that unknown state, must receive at once an endowment of faculties of its own which are to us inconceivable. For this reason, it is exceedingly doubtful whether we could at all imagine, or take in as an object of our cognizance, the manner of that future existence.

And, even supposing that we could do so, is it desirable that we should have this wonderful knowledge before us ? Could it be made profitable for this life's wants or duties ? You may say that not knowing what it is, we are unable to answer this question. This is not quite correct rea-

soning. We perhaps can answer it, judging by the analogy of similar cases: nay, we can also judge in some measure even, from the necessary relative character of that which is so unknown. We do not then commonly find that the knowledge of subjects entirely removed from our path in life is, for life's purposes, a gain to men; and from the complete barrier set up by God's Providence between this life and that other, it is probable that this knowledge, even if we could take it in, would, so far from serving, prove detrimental to our life's business and enjoyments. That which the poet could write of the inferior animals,—

“The lamb thy riot dooms to bleed to-day,  
Had he thy reason, would he skip and play?”—

may be not without its application in a higher measure in our own case also. The

magnitude and solemnity of the revelations connected with that other state might be such as to incapacitate us for our ordinary duties, and to take from us all that lightness of heart and spring of energy which are so essential to life's vigorous and healthy action. Even when we reason about this present life and things we know, we see the truth of this argument. We see how beneficent is the Providence which has shut up the future from us : how much more intense our sufferings would be, if, like Him who bore all our griefs, we went forth knowing all that should come upon us. And let it not be objected to what we are now saying, that we are thus assuming our future unknown state to be one of sorrow and suffering ; for the same is true of the anticipation of great joy which is true of the anticipation of great sorrow or pain. It



unfits a man for present duties, and induces a fluttering and excited frame, quite unsuited for the performance of duty, and incompatible with that repose by which, in its intervals, we become strengthened for its renewed performance.

It has then never yet been manifested what we shall be ; and it is well it has not. But this is by no means all that is to be said upon the matter. None indeed can describe that which we shall be ; but it does not follow from this, that the revelation which has made known to us the existence of that future has not also imparted to us the knowledge of some facts respecting it which we can know, and which it is good for us to know ; nor does it follow, considering that the existence of ourselves implies some sort of continuity, that we may not find something which we now possess



of which we can say that it must continue and be further developed in that new state. Of these further revelations the Apostle goes on to speak, and we will treat another time. Of the other kind manifestly is that state which he had just mentioned—"now we are children of God." He has begotten us anew with the word of truth ; He has adopted us into His family and given us our place in His Church, not for this world only, or with reference to this time now present, but with reference to that unknown and unmanifested future. All that belongs to our state as His children is at present imperfect and undeveloped. God's children must be, as He is, incorruptible, ever fresh in strength and vigour ; but we are under the bondage of corruption, and live only to decay. That future will bring with it, whatever precisely the words may mean,

deliverance from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God. Again, God's children ought to be perfect in accordance with His will and obedience to His law ; and how far we are from being thus, every one who hears me knows. Nay, such attainment would be even impossible during the present state. Our conditions of being do not admit of perfection ; and we surely cannot suppose that God has made us His children for nought, or that He meant to begin a work and then break it off in the midst, as a man might do, from failure of power or adverse combinations of circumstances. It is plain that we are to look for a great and glorious development and expansion of our state as children of God in that unknown future ; an increase of blessedness which our Lord describes as "seeing God:" a change which

in the opening of this season has been presented to us as day compared to night, light compared to darkness. And notice that this glorious change is none the less certain for being indescribable. We see the depository which holds the treasure ;— we know that it is there because He is faithful that hath promised—because He hath planted in our spiritual consciousness the instinct of heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ ; we see the depository of the treasure, though we have not the key and cannot yet find out and examine the treasure itself. And as the concealment of the manner and phenomena of that future life is for our good, so is the revealing of the certainty of our further development in it as the perfected children of God. We may work by the sunlight, though we cannot yet gaze upon the sun : we may shine

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with that glory reflected, though we do not at present walk in the midst of it. And this is what is aimed at, when it is said: "Ye all are children of the light and of the day:" "let us cast away the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light."

I would draw to a close with a practical matter of fact applying of such exhortations as they affect the thoughts and conduct of us who are here present.

Another Advent—and we are still in the accepted time—still passing the day when salvation is offered us. The state of children of God, unless we have been passing so many years in vain, is more assured to us, more laid up in our experience, sits more naturally on us. It is to be feared that with some in our days, the longer they live, the more they doubt. Surely this is

reversing the natural and healthy order of things. "I know whom I have believed," is a consciousness which ought to be growing up and ripening in a man, as he passes on in the Christian life. And such a feeling is no less needful than natural. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand."—"Now is our salvation"—our great change, which ought to issue in final bliss, "nearer than when we believed," which is as much in our case as to say, than when we were first made members of Christ's Church. We want support, we want increasing assurance. And how shall we get it? How, my friends, but by building up and strengthening faith\* in the daily practice of humble obedience, of self-denial and love? Notice what strange language this seems of the Apostle which I have just quoted. If what we are now is plain, and what we shall be

no one knows, how can he say, "the night is far spent, the day is at hand"? Why did he not rather say, "the day is far spent, the night is at hand"? For did not our blessed Lord Himself speak once even thus, when He said, "I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work"? Doubtless: but He spoke of the day of work, and the night of rest; whereas St. Paul is speaking of the night of faith and the day of fruition; the knowledge in part and the knowledge face to face; the night also when evil men and evil things are abroad, and the day when they trouble no more. It is the Christian's faith which turns the world's day into night and the world's night into day. "Who knows if life be death, and death be life," sang the old Greek tragedian, in the days of dark-



ness. What he nobly guessed, we know by faith, and live upon that knowledge. What we are now, we know—the obscurity that veils our footsteps, the lights that man has kindled, the Lights that God has kindled, to guide us; our own ignorance we know, our own weakness we know—each soul its own trouble, each heart its own sore, running in the night season and ceasing not. For the children of God now are like sick men in the long night, vexed and tossing and crying out for repose: in them dwelleth no good thing: anxiety seems too much for them, grace too little: now are we children of God; still it is an inheritance long coming, a hope deferred that maketh the heart sick. But meantime the unknown state is coming nearer and nearer; the streaks of day are gathering in the horizon: like the throbbing of



the distant train upon the wind, the tokens of His coming are beginning to be heard. How long shall the Church wait for the bridegroom to appear? How long shall the heavens bar in our returning Lord? The Spirit and the Bride say, Come: and let him that heareth say, Come: let that be perfected which we are—let that appear which we shall be. Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus.





SERMON VI.





## VI.

“It doth not yet appear what we shall be” [or, it was never yet manifested what we shall be].—I JOHN iii. 2.

ON this Sunday in Advent, our attention is especially drawn to the Holy Scriptures; and of the various points of view in which they might be considered, their prophetic character is that which is most prominently put before us. It will be of some interest in reference to our subject to follow to-day the guidance of the Church in what we shall say upon it. I shall, therefore, inquire into the principal revelations of Holy Scripture respecting our future state; and in doing so I shall

endeavour to show that all this does not at all amount to manifesting what we shall be.

In this matter of the state of man after death the earlier Scriptures are silent. The mention in them of blessing and of well-being seems to be principally made with reference to good in this present life. At the same time, it is doubtful whether certain expressions used in them would be at all intelligently received [such are, *e. g.*, "Enoch walked with God : and he was not : for God took him"], except by those who were acquainted with the doctrine of a life beyond the grave.

Such, again, is the language of the dying Jacob : " I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." In the former case, the words can hardly be understood except thus, that God, whose companion and friend Enoch

had been, took him, as we say even now, to Himself to be with Him in another state. And though it may be said, that this shows nothing as to the ideas prevalent with regard to the general lot of mankind after death, because in this particular case death did not take place, yet it may safely be maintained that the mere narration, how one man among men was admitted to the heavenly presence of God exceptionally, *i.e.*, without death, would naturally imply that others who lived as he did were understood to be admitted to the same presence by the ordinary method of death. Again, when Jacob used those other words, I see not what possible meaning they could have except that of an expression of dying hope. He had been waiting,—whether the record be taken as applying to the season of his old age and weakness, or be



extended over a longer period,—he had been waiting for something which he calls “God’s salvation,” and which, by his very expression, was then to come to him ; and I see not how such words could bear any meaning, unless he anticipated a condition of increased blessedness after that his dissolution, which was fast approaching. If it be thought that the testimonies on so important a matter are in the early Scriptures but scanty, it must be remembered how very little those Scriptures deal with the sentiments or hopes of individuals ; and where they do, how much they are employed in drawing the broad distinction between the idolater and the servants of God. The belief in a future state of bliss for these latter might well have been as general as we take it to have been, without any more allusion to it being made than

that which we now find. When the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him," he was using words which could hardly be mistaken as if they applied wholly to this present life. The Christians to whom he was writing were familiar with the term "*reward*," as expressing their hope beyond the grave, and could not otherwise understand it. And thus, too, considering that these Christians were Jews also, must they have understood God's own words to Abraham, when He said to him, "I am thy exceeding great reward." And if the readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews thus understood them, we may safely say that such had been their generally received meaning among the Jews. As we pass down the

books of the Old Testament Scriptures, we meet with a singularly precise and graphic declaration on this point in the book of Job, and from the mouth of that patriarch himself: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine own eyes shall behold, and not another." So strong a testimony have these words appeared to the Church, that for long ages every Christian body has been met with them when borne to its temporary rest in the grave. Their precision is indeed most remarkable. The appearance of a Deliverer of men at a future day on this earth, and the standing of His saints before Him in their risen bodies,—we must maintain that nothing

less than this is declared by them, whatever be the varieties of rendering adopted. The date of this mysterious book has never been exactly ascertained among biblical scholars ; but at all events it belongs to the great Old Testament period, and expresses the feelings of a servant of God long before Christ came.

The richest treasury of individual utterances of hope is found of course in the book of Psalms. And none can deny that the belief in life beyond the grave is there very plainly expressed. The remarkable passage in Ps. xvi., which is familiar to us all, can hardly bear any meaning short of confidence in God's preservation of even the bodies of His saints in the grave, and their admission into bliss in His presence hereafter. In its proper and primary sense, indeed, we are taught by St. Peter that

this passage related as a prophecy to our Blessed Lord. David himself, he tells us, was put in the grave, and did see corruption. Still, even thus, the words do not lose their personal reference, but rather rest it on Him who is the resurrection and the life, and in whom is our life and hope.

It is not our present object to follow on through the remaining Old Testament books, explaining every passage which might be supposed to have reference to a life to come. Of these there are several, more or less plain. All that we would impress on you is, that in none of them is any direct revelation made as to what we shall be. Rather is that momentous question, by the very terms of some of these passages, left involved in additional mystery. When, for instance, it is declared that at the death of man the dust returns

to the earth as it was, but the spirit returneth to God who gave it, no light is thrown by the words upon the manner of the return, or the nature of our condition when it is accomplished. And when the prophets announce again and again the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord, and the gathering of His saints to Him, they drop no hint as to the change which shall thereby pass upon those saints, or those others who shall not be of their number. When the prophet Daniel tells of what shall happen after the great trouble of the latter days, and says, "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt," though the words seem beyond all doubt to point to the great event of which we all know, no light again is shed by them on the



doubt of what kind that life and that contempt shall be.

But let us come now to the passages in which we are to-day mainly concerned; those, I mean, of the New Testament, in which most seems to be declared about that life on the other side of the grave. First, our Lord Himself, in His discourses, now and then lifts, as it were, a corner of the veil which hides that other world, and shows us a spark or two of the glory beyond it. But these revelations are always so expressed, that the mysterious inquiry, what we shall be, is left unanswered. He tells us, for instance, of our future equality with God's holy angels, and the consequent non-existence of those relations of this life which have reference to the decay and reproduction of our race; but yet we know not what we shall be, for we know



not what those angels are; nor can it be said that we may infer what they are from their having again and again appeared to men, for those appearances can only have taken place by their becoming visible to human senses, and if so, none have seen them as they are. Again, when we learn from our blessed Lord that His saints will be with Him where He is, and will behold His glory which the Father has given Him, we are still less than before able to conceive in what form, by what manner of perception, we shall stand by, and behold that which now seems so infinitely above us.

As we advance, we find some revelations in the writings of the Apostles, which, at first sight, seem to come very near to a manifestation of what we shall be. Of these, the great argument in 1 Corinthians

xv. furnishes the most prominent example. There, as you know, St. Paul is opposing those who said that there was no resurrection of the dead. First he demonstrates their error by the fact of Christ having arisen from the dead, who is our Head, and the second inclusive Adam of our race. Then he goes on to reply to the question, "How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?" And here, if anywhere, we might imagine the question—what we shall be—would find its answer. But it does not. The reply is given by analogies in nature, bearing indeed closely on the point, but revealing nothing. The seed dropped into the ground comes forth, not with the old body, but with a new one given by God : why may not the same be the case with the dead ? And there need be no insuperable difficulty in conceiving this,

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for we know of various kinds of flesh, as we do of differing kinds of light, and of bodies heavenly and bodies earthly. Then the Apostle, from his sacred stores of divinely imparted knowledge, declares to us a mystery,—that all shall be changed from the natural body to the spiritual body at the time of the general resurrection ; and upon the blessedness and glory of that change his concluding song of triumph is founded. But in all this there is not one word to explain to us the nature of the new spiritual body, or of the change whereby we shall pass into it. In spite of all this wonderful and reassuring argument, none hath ever yet declared what we shall be.

It might be imagined that a nearer approach to this declaration would necessarily be found in the Book of Revelation, where the descriptions of future glory are

so many and so copious. And doubtless these descriptions do quicken our imaginations and strengthen our hopes more than any similar disclosures in Holy Scripture. Still, they are as far from manifesting what we shall be as any others that have been quoted. The absence of sorrow and pain, the presence of triumph and joy, are set forth in the most vivid terms ; but it is in language drawn entirely from the habits and wants of this our present state, not from the new habits and wants of that future one. What we shall be, if set forth at all, is only set forth by negating or intensifying that which we are. When we read that they shall hunger no more nor thirst any more, but that God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, it is plain we are being taught to think in our own language, not in theirs. Nay, when we go

on to read that the sun shall not light upon them nor any heat, it is further plain that not even the common language of the whole earth is here used, but only the form of speech of that particular part of it where the writer himself lived. To us whose lot is cast under the leaden skies of the cheerless north, it would rather seem to describe enjoyment that clouds lighted not on them, nor any cold. And this is the very best proof to us, how absolutely nothing of what we shall be has really been revealed, even where most seems to have been revealed. It is all as if we were with our thoughts and imaginations, even when they are divinely guided, only building up a ladder which may reach to heaven ; but whenever we attempt to place it against the bulwarks of the celestial city, it proves all too short, and will not reach. And so it will be to the end. We

shall be changed. We shall pass as it were through a crucible, and our whole spirit, soul, and body, remaining in identity the same, will come out new, partakers of a different life, using different senses, thinking different thoughts. On the one hand, this *must* be; and on the other, it very well may be. It must be. As flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, so neither can the senses which inform flesh and blood inform us of the realities of that new state. If they bear, in their new state, some analogy to their present uses, this is all that we can at present surmise. The thoughts of flesh and blood,—those thoughts of which it is mainly true that nothing is in our intellect which has not been previously in our sense,—must be changed, and their very ground shifted, before we can be conversant with and carry about us



the maxims and habits of a life so totally different. How much of our present selves will survive the change, how much will bear transmuting into that new existence ; whether tints of character, outward or inward, which are now fleeting or unpromising, may pass as it were through fire, and become fixed and brightened in the enamel of eternal beauty and freshness, we cannot say ; but the change must be : so far is evident. And it very well may be, even according to our present conceptions. As St. Paul shows in the case of the body, so might it be shown in that of the whole man, with his thoughts and habits. All these are not the same in all men, or in all races of men. If we were to transplant into the midst of ourselves, our ways and habits, a native of a far distant country and an alien race, he



would find very little indeed in common with us. Our speech, our daily customs, even our food, would be all strange to him. Nay, even among ourselves, the thoughts and desires of a child differ entirely from those of the youth or maiden, and those again from the man of business, or the matron, and those again from the characteristics of old age. And we may take a more striking example still from the standing and permanent difference in the thoughts and characters of the two sexes. Both of the highest order of God's creation, both capable of the tenderest and loftiest feelings and thoughts, and of the highest aspirations, the two yet differ essentially : their points of departure are different, their methods of joining thought to thought are different ; the way in which they regard inferences and consequences

is different ; the relative places which first principles and practical difficulties hold are different ; the two minds are and will ever be found differently constituted. But it may be said, there is a difficulty in conceiving of ourselves as passing into another condition while retaining our identity. As to this, the example of the difference between childhood and maturity might be a sufficient answer to it, were it not that we have abundance of others. Circumstances, in their change, will also completely change the character and thoughts and habits of a man. Take a mere workman in the field ; take him again a quarter of a century later, the ruling minister of a kingdom : if you could map out the two characters with all their interests and feelings and habits, could any two different men differ more

widely, except indeed in this, which bears a close analogy with our present subject, that certain marks of identity, burnt as it were into the individual identity, survive the change?

And so, my brethren, we fall back on the simple words of our text, "it never was yet manifested what we shall be." We have never seen, we could never see, one of those who have passed beyond that closed door, in the state in which he is there. One indeed has returned to us, and He, in a sense, not one of us but all of us. Of Him the Apostle proceeds to speak in the words which follow my text; and on that part of the subject, please God, we will enter next Sunday. But in a word we may say now what we hope to make plain in more words then, that what He is now hath not been manifested; that none as

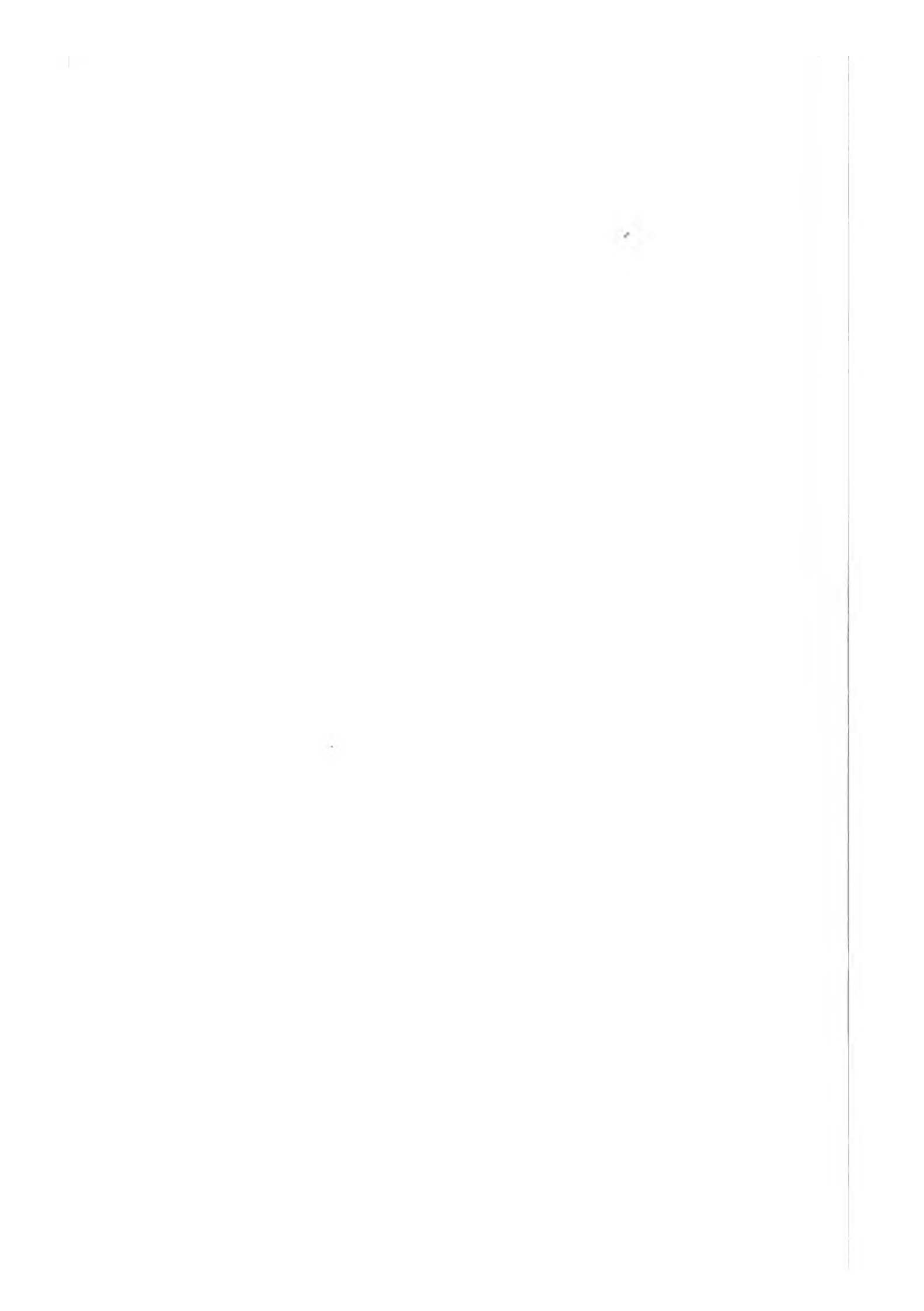
yet hath seen Him as He is. We have, then, to-day, been carried one step further. Not only is this great question of our future condition hidden from us and our powers to answer it, but nothing from God, much as He has revealed, has as yet solved it. Indeed, as we shall see I hope in what remains, we cannot solve it till it is solved in us.

May we so wait for it to appear that its appearing may be to us the opening of a blessed immortality! May we so live in Him who is Life and Joy, that when He shall appear we may appear with Him in glory.





SERMON VII.







## VII.

“It doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him ; for we shall see Him as He is.”—I JOHN iii. 2.

**W**E have already spoken in six sermons of the certainty of the present—now are we children of God, and of the uncertainty of the non-apparent future—it never yet was manifested what we shall be. To this uncertainty, it seems, from the further words which I have now read, that the Apostle makes one exception. One thing about that unrevealed future we do know. And what is that one thing? Let us first get the words themselves

accurately. In the phrase, "when He shall appear," the personal pronoun is not expressed in the original, and the verb "appear" is the same as that which has just before been used. So that it is more probably to be rendered, not "when He shall appear," but, "when it shall be manifested," or, "if it should be manifested"; and, rendering it thus, we shall have the whole sentence as follows:—"Beloved, now are we children of God, and it never yet was manifested what we shall be: but we know that, if it should be manifested [*i. e.*, whenever it shall be manifested], we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." When that mysterious state, now so utterly excluded by its very nature from our knowledge, shall have become actual, of one thing about it we are sure. Let us now try to search into this one thing, and

see what it is, and to how much the knowledge amounts.

First of all, observe that which must strike every one on hearing the words—viz., that a well-known person is here spoken of as He: “We shall be like Him.” And this personal pronoun is not to be interpreted according to the general rule, as referring to the principal Person before mentioned, for that was the Father: “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God.” And this cannot be the Father, for we never can see Him as He is. Nay, in that very same first verse of the chapter another Person is introduced, when it is said, “Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not; for this was not God the Father, but God the Son, of whom the same

Apostle says, He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not." The Apostle's thoughts are so fixed upon his Divine Master, that He is their continual object, spoken of without introduction or explanation : " We shall be like Him," the Lord Jesus Christ, " for we shall see Him," *i.e.*, Christ, " as He is."

Now our first inquiry must be, why, in such a matter, He is introduced. For in this reason of His being introduced will in great part lie wrapped up the explanation of what follows. What are the facts respecting Him? He, appearing as man on this our earth, in course of time died as man, and entered into that unknown future state. Now this He might have done, being the pure Teacher and spotless Example which we know Him to have

been ; and yet His death and His going into that future state may have been no concern of ours at all. Abraham is dead, and the prophets ; and though He may have been immeasurably purer and holier than any of them, yet this surpassing holiness would in this respect have put no distinction between Him and them. But, it may be said, He differs from them in that He came back to us from that unknown state, and showed us in a measure what it is. Doubtless ; but so did the Shunamite's child, and Jairus's daughter, and the son of the widow at Nain, and Lazarus at Bethany, and others : and we have no particular interest in any of them. So that this Person must in some essential point differ from all others, in order to make Him fit to be introduced as He is here. All of us must have a general in-

terest in Him which we have in no one else. He must be to every one of us the centre, so to speak, of our common nature; so that when we come to think what we are, or what we shall be, our best answer will be found by asking ourselves what He is. And this, not by way of moral example, but by way of absolute and plain fact. How clearly does this same Apostle speak of this being so when he says, as the ground of our confidence in the day of judgment, "because as He is, so are we in this world." He is just this Centre and this Head of our common race, so that whatever befell Him also befell us; and we all have common interest in Him. So that His going down into the mysterious future state does not for us rank with the fact of the death of any one of the sons of men; nor is His coming back



again from the dead to be spoken of with the return of Lazarus or any of those others. But when He died for all, then all died; and when He rose again, then we rose again with Him. And so He is also the firstfruit of the great harvest of mankind—not only their inclusive Head, but also their pattern and model; so that we are quite sure of the truth of the proposition, “As He is, so we shall be.” Now what has He done? He has entered into and taken upon Him in full that mysterious unknown state of which we have before spoken. His present shall be our future. When that state, now all dark to us, shall be manifested, we know that it will consist in likeness to Him: “We shall be like,” “we shall be made like” “Him.”

The next question naturally is, To what does this knowledge amount? Do we



know what being like Him means? But before we attempt any reply to it, we must take into consideration the reason which the Apostle subjoins for saying, "we shall be like Him;" because in this reason lie some most important distinctions and explanations. "We shall be like Him, *for*" [*i.e., because*] "we shall see Him as He is." You will at once see that these words may be taken in two ways. They may mean, either "We know that we shall be like Him, because the sight of Him as He is will change us into His perfect image;" or, "We know that we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is; and this no one can do without being like Him, without being in the same state as that in which He is." Both these meanings are possible; but of the two, I think the latter the more probable. The Apostle is not

speaking so much of some change to be brought about by the sight of our blessed Lord in glory, as of the amount of knowledge which we have of our state there, as revealed to us by some fact already made certain to us. Now such a fact is our seeing Him as He is. In His own parting prayer He had said, "Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given me may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me." This then is certain, that we,—that means His saved ones, His Church,—shall see Him as He is. And this, the Apostle argues, can only be brought about by our being like Him. That glory of His cannot be beheld except by those who have entered into its likeness. Even here on earth this same principle is frequently illustrated. The habits and interests of a

society or a family are not known to those who are outside it; only the members understand them. And this is the more so in proportion as those habits and interests are peculiar, or kept secret. Much more then when the condition spoken of, with all its habits and interests, is entirely removed and hidden from our present capacities. That we shall see Him as He is, is of itself sufficient proof that we *must* be like Him.

But it may be said, Has not He been seen since He has entered into that state, and was He then not seen as He is? The answer is obvious. First, those manifestations of Him after His resurrection were previous to the full assumption of His glory. "I am not yet," He said, "ascended to my Father." Again, there was doubtless the hiding of His existing glory

in those appearances. Real they were, not visionary: this is necessitated by what passed during them. "Handle me," He said, "and see that it is I myself; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." So that, unless this were the actual condition of the Lord's body in the new state, His own challenge to them to test His identity would be a mere illusion. So far then He has been seen as He is; but of course only so far as mortal eyes were capable of beholding Him. All that glory which He had with the Father before the world began can only, by the very terms of His prayers, be seen by being where He is. As long as He was lingering about His former haunts on this earth below, it was,—though His greater humiliation was gone by,—yet but as it were a continued abasement of Himself to the

level of His disciples' capacities. Yet, such as it was, it was full of instruction for us regarding that new state into which He has entered, and which we shall enter after Him. All that was essential to the state itself was present when He uttered the challenge which I have quoted. He was able to be recognised by those who had known Him before. The marks of His recent crucifixion were upon Him. Only when we come to inquire into the nature of that real and recognisable Body comes in the truth, "it was never yet manifested what we shall be." How should a real palpable body appear in the midst when the doors were shut? And if this were to be set down to the Divine power which was always resident in Him, even in the days of His flesh, where is exactly the line to be drawn between that

which belonged to Him exceptionally, as we say, and that which shall belong to us generally? These appearances do not then guide us far; no farther, perhaps, than to the truth that that blessed state into which He has entered is compatible with and shall be endowed with the known and recognisable body which we had here below. As to any appearances of Him since He has been received up into glory, no argument can be derived from them, because we have no argument founded upon them, such as that of His identity on that other occasion; and because they were obviously all vouchsafed in visions and not in the intercourse of common life, as those others were. His appearances to St. Paul, on the road to Damascus and in the Temple, may be ranged rather with the Old Testament manifestations of God



than with those of the forty days after the Resurrection. And when we come to the appearance to the beloved Apostle in the Revelation, we manifestly are altogether out of the region where any arguments can be founded as to His real state in glory ; the whole was a sublime vision for the purposes of that heavenly scenery which was about to be unfolded before the eyes of the seer.

Thus much then we know, but no more : that whatever glory He has assumed as belonging to the renewed and glorified state of our race, that we also shall put on —“When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall we also be manifested with Him in glory.”

But here arises an important question, Who are they that shall be manifested ; who are they that shall be like Him, and



thereby shall have the sight of Him? Observe, my brethren, that this is not a question of mere bodily sight. Even if it were, we might have something to say of refined vision, of the training of the sense to perceive glory and majesty and beauty. Show the most exquisite work of art to the uneducated rustic, or even to one who, otherwise well informed, has had no training in art, and its beauty will remain unappreciated. The fairest landscape has no charm for the tiller of the field from whence it is seen. So that even thus we might say that the eye of man might fail to apprehend that glory even when manifested. But let it also be observed that in each of these examples the training, though it has acted on the sense in rendering it acute and discriminating, has been carried on in the mind and thought of the man.

It is there that instruction has imparted the rules and distinctions of art ; there that the appreciation of colour and form in landscape has been learned. And so must it be in the case with which we are now concerned. In order to see the glorified Redeemer as He is, the eye of man's spirit must have been educated. The carnal man, the mere worldly man, the man of business or of pleasure, has no faculty whatever wherewith to appreciate the purity and holiness which make up the glory which the Father has given Him. Such a man would only find in the sight of the Son of God, as He is, something to scorn and despise. We cannot see Him as He is without being like Him. This was found to be true of that full sight in the future unknown state ; but it is also true of the preparation for this sight in the

present state which we do know and can speak of with certainty. If we are ever to see Him as He is, we must be becoming like Him in those blessed qualities the triumph of which make up His heavenly glory. If you are not growing in singleness and purity of purpose—if you are not growing in meekness and self-denial—if you are not, as life goes on, obtaining victories over self and sin, you are not on the way to being like Him, you cannot see Him as He is in that unknown future state. For of this one thing be sure,—that whatever, and however great, the change may be which shall introduce us into that state, we ourselves shall remain the same. I mean, that our inner desires and purposes, our bent and custom of thought—these will not be rooted up and superseded by new ones ; but as, in this present life,

the boy is father of the man—the youth's views and thoughts in their main course survive the change from youth to age ; so, in our whole life of time and eternity, this childhood of the state now present must contain the germs of that future maturity. What has never begun now will not be first implanted then. A man must have yearned after the image of Christ here, if he is to wear the image of Christ there.

And if this be so ; if the measure of our attainment of His likeness here is to be the measure of our sight-to-sight enjoyment of His presence there, may we not say,—are we not compelled to say,—more, and to infer that He is by His various dispensations in Providence training not us only as individuals, but also His whole Church, for that glorious manifestation of Himself and of the children whom God

hath given Him ? Does not such a thought allay the sickness of deferred hope of His coming, seeing that as yet we may not be ripe for it—that we have more to learn about His Person, more about His Word, more about His Church ; seeing that as yet we are not wise enough, not large-hearted enough — that the Churches of Christendom are as yet too cold and unkindly, too wedded to prescribed habits and narrow thoughts ; seeing that dispensations of His are yet to come, which shall shake us loose from our fetters and make His Church better comprehend and practice the liberty wherewith He hath set us free ? O my brethren, if our Advent thoughts are to be anything real, if our words here are to be anything better than demure pulpit conventionalities, surely we ought to look from year to year with some such senti-

ments as these over the signs of the times and the tokens that He is giving us. With some such sentiments, I say, as regards our brethren who have the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, and what as regards the heathen outside? What, as regards the great surrounding kingdom of thick darkness? Here again we have pulpit sayings and platform sayings enough and to spare ; far more than will work. We want some yearning hearts, some, not new doctrines, not new motives, but new springing up of feeling and of energy—new and strange sense of the work-day business-like weight of our Captain's command, which should set our sober-minded nature about pushing Christianity more after a real fashion than she has ever yet done. This is what we want ; but don't go away and say, Yes, but we



haven't got it, and are not likely to have it. Don't sit waiting for it. God may send it in His good time ; and meanwhile He has given us good tried instruments to labour with, well-organized societies, doing their work — their limited, paltry work, compared to what it ought to be, but still their important work — thoroughly well, and in a manner entirely to be trusted. Till God sends us that which we pray for — a rich outpouring of His Spirit to spread our Master's word and His Church, these are His appointed instruments, with these we are bound to work. To these, one of these,—there shall be no mincing the matter,—it is every Christian man's duty—more, the duty of every man, woman, and child in every rank of Christ's Church—to contribute. He or she who is doing nothing for missions is but half a Christian;



and our Master will not tolerate, much less will He reward, half Christians. Our collections on these occasions are for the most part dreary sights. Why? When we come to count by-and-by, there will be perhaps a very little gold, plenty (as things go) of silver, decent averages of shillings and half-crowns; but in this is the dreariness, that there is hardly any copper—the mass of those I see before me is not represented at all. The great body of people here assembled have heard our Master's voice saying, "Do my work;" and they have answered one by one as they passed out, "I won't." O my friends, this is not growing in His likeness—this is anything but a preparation for the day when, though we know not what we shall be, we know this much, that "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

SERMON VIII.





## VIII.

“And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”—I. JOHN iii. 3.

**W**E have arrived at the end of Advent, and also at the end of our present course of sermons. And this is the conclusion of the whole matter. We are now the children of God. What we shall be hereafter is a matter hidden from all of us. One thing only we know respecting it: that when it shall be manifested, we shall be like our glorified Lord; that we are sure of, because we know that we shall see Him as He is; and this we could not do without being as He is. This prospect, then, is to

us matter of hope. We have an assured expectation that it shall be, but not a definite idea of that which shall be in detail. So we hope it. And now, what is said by the Apostle about the effect of such a hope upon him who entertains it?

As before, let us first get our words right, and understand what they say. As they stand printed before us, there is an opportunity of making a mistake about them. What they really mean is this: Every man that hath, that possesses, this hope in Him, this hope resting on him, *i.e.*, resting on Christ, purifieth himself, even as He is pure. But as the words stand, they look as if they meant, Every man that hath this hope in him, *i.e.*, has within himself, or, as we say, within his breast, this hope, purifieth himself, even as He is pure. And we often hear even clergymen fall into this

trap, and read the verse as if it meant this: thus, of course, as we shall presently see, taking all the force of what is asserted out of it. An effectual way of avoiding this in future, would be to take your Bibles, and with a pencil put a capital H to the word Him, thus marking that it means our Lord, and not the man who has the hope.

Well then, we will take this point first for consideration. That the hope spoken of is in—or, more literally, *rests upon*—Him, the Lord Jesus Christ. All hope rests upon some ground or other, if it be a hope of which any account can be given. There are hopes of which no account can be given, and which rest upon nothing. Such a hope is that of the hypocrite, which, we are told, shall perish—the hope of a man living an ungodly life and hoping to be all safe when he dies. Examine this hope, and

there is beneath it no substratum of fact ; no explanation can make it clear why the person should entertain such a hope at all. But this hope is different. It has a foundation to rest upon. It is grounded on Christ. Notice this very particularly, for on it all which follows depends. Christ is the foundation of the hope. How so, and why ? Because at first sight it would look as if the more natural place to have recourse to for the foundation of this hope were, the character of our past lives, or the tendency of our desires, or something in ourselves from which we could infer which way we are tending. If, as we said, the ungodly man is forbidden by the character of his life to entertain this hope, then surely the children of God will be warranted by the character of their lives to entertain it. This seems reasonable ; but it is very



instructive to see that it is not so : the hope rests, not on ourselves at all, but on Him, on our blessed Lord. And how does this instruct us ? Why, it teaches us that He, and His accomplished work in our natures are absolute, all-including facts, to be made the ground of hope simply in themselves, and without digging into this ground, so to speak, any characteristics or experiences, or anything of our own. Now are we children of God. Yes, it is true thus much is said about ourselves ; but mark, this is not our own. Of His own will begat He us : it is He that made us His children, and not we ourselves. And this is most strikingly shown in the ordinary practice of the Church. Our infants are admitted into the state of children of God and members of Christ even before their consciousness begins. And this, so far from being, as

objectors to Infant Baptism suppose, inconsistent with the nature and character of our state as God's children, is most agreeable to its very essence and requirements—that it should be all of Him, and resting on Him in whom we are adopted into God's family ; and not resting at all upon our working it out, or our maturity of understanding and apprehending it, or anything in us whatever. It is a state put upon us by God's free grace and favour, irrespectively of our own condition or merits. And as the beginning, so every particular of the full bestowal of the state rests upon Him and upon none else. Why do you hope, why do I hope, to see our Blessed Lord as He is, and in consequence to be like Him? Because of what He has done for us. We know that our Redeemer liveth. We believe that He has taken our nature upon

Him ; has in that nature fulfilled God's law for us ; has put away our sin by His death ; has conquered death for us by His resurrection ; pleads the merits of His blood for us before the Father in glory. And I know that all this—His righteousness, His atonement, His victory, His glory,—is mine, just because I simply believe it as bound up in Him and put upon me, made mine, in that membership of His Church whereinto I have been admitted by His grace ; so that all hope arising from all this is grounded on, rests upon, Him, and upon nothing else.

And now notice how the words which follow put faith and works in their right and their only right places. Every man that hath this hope resting upon Christ—here is the prior condition—here is the mind of faith ; and what follows ? What

are the fruits of this faith, resulting in hope for the future? Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure. His life-long struggle springs out of his hope, and that hope is grounded on his faith in Christ. He does not carry on this struggle in order that it may in the end result in a hope for the future; if he did, all his efforts would be vain; but he fights on against evil in the power of his faith and hope. This will more abundantly appear when we come to see of what nature his struggle is. Of this let us now inquire. Every one who hopes to be like Him hereafter, *purifies himself*, even as He is pure. He is aware, that though perfect likeness to Him will never be attained till the great change has come, and we see Him as He is, yet for that perfection the present life must be a

preparation, or it will never be realized at all. And in that preparation, what is the one obstacle which stands between us and likeness to Him? Doubtless, it might be variously described, according as one side or another of its working is brought out and dwelt on. But it is all comprehended in one word—we cannot be like Him because we are impure. Our purpose is not single; our acts are not regulated by a simple desire for good; the source of our desires is not clear, but turbid; our hearts are not united to serve and to love Him. And this is true of every one of us. From the hypocrite who comes here and takes his seat before God with the impurity of practised and allowed sin upon him—known by others as a scandal and a disgrace, to the holiest man that ever entered these walls, the charge is true of all; we

are impure, and that hinders us from growing in His likeness who is all purity. There is not a heart here present that has not deep and daily need of purifying. If there is one that knows not the need and repudiates the charge, it is because that need is more urgent and that charge more deeply incurred than in the case of others. Every one who looks into his own thoughts, if he be an honest man, must be aware of his own want of simplicity of purpose, of the mingling of selfish desires with his best frames of mind, of his failure to be, any part of any day, the upright and self-denying person he had resolved to be. We will suppose that in the midst of this daily and hourly failure, the hope exists of which we have been speaking. And mind, I do not mean exists in a dormant state, as a mere matter of profession



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when convenient—asleep now, and to be aroused on the death-bed. All to whom I am speaking would claim to have this hope in some sense or other. Nothing is commoner than a thoroughly worldly life, utterly void of any Christian motive or act, and yet this hope, of going to heaven, as it is called, wrapped up and put away somewhere, and supposed to be ready for production when it may happen to be wanted. But I am not speaking of that kind of hope. I am speaking of a hope which, like every hope known or talked about in common life, is a warm and working principle within a man; a hope to the fulfilment of which he looks earnestly forward, and towards the attainment of which he frames his daily actions; a hope like that of winning distinction in life, or any other practical end that men set before



themselves. Suppose such a hope to spring up and work in a man conscious of his own impurity, conscious of the immense distance which separates him from that likeness to his Lord which he may and must attain here in preparation for what is to come hereafter, What will be the result? That is our present inquiry. Will it not be, must it not be, the purifying himself—all through life, day by day, till the end is reached? And how will this be done? We have not, we lack altogether, the idea of perfect purity. All our notions are relative. We measure ourselves by our neighbours, and we are apt to be contented if in our own esteem we make a good figure among those with whom our comparison is made. We exaggerate every deed of our own which seems to deserve praise, and we depreciate

every similar deed of others ; and the result is a self-satisfied reflection, Well, then, after all, I was not so bad, and they were not so good, it might seem. This standard of purity will never lead to our purifying ourselves : and this is the highest to which the non-Christian ever attains. If it be asked, Where shall we look for a pattern which we can comprehend, and which will lead us onward to higher and higher degrees of self-purification? the answer, from the very nature of the case, is most obvious. It arises from the hope itself of which we speak, and which prompts the struggle after purity. Our hope is to be one day like Him ; to be enabled to see Him as He is, by having put on His character. Well, then, this struggle after purity, which is grounded on this hope, has ever before it

as its standard and pattern, "as He is pure." And how can it have this ever uplifted in sight, ever full of meaning and inviting to exertion? How pure is He? Where may we see His purity reflected? Let me ask another question. For what were the holy gospels written? Why has God given us four different portraits of that same Divine character, written faithfully, written simply, given with all the glow which can warm our hearts, able to interest alike young and old, rich and poor? Why, but that we might in them apprehend and study this His purity, which it is to be the aim of our lives to attain? "Even as He is pure." Imagine the hope of being like Him working within the heart, and this pattern uplifted before the sight; and then what will a man think of the holy gospels? Will

they not be to him very precious indeed? Will he not search in them to find out, under every feature of his struggle after purity, how pure He was, what He said and did, as our great example of purity? "Purifieth himself." But how? By what daily practice? For it is not enough to look upon a spotless garment, in order to have our own garments spotless. No amount of mere contemplation of Christ will purify us, though it may be most essential to the success of the work of self-purifying. Again, no amount of precepts or maxims will do it—books cannot effect it, preachers cannot bring it about. No, my friend, this is a work which none other can do for you; you cannot keep out impurity by reposing while another watches at your door; you must up and mount guard, and act sentinel over yourself.

Every man that hath this hope in Christ *purifieth himself*. Yes, and anon comes the tempter and whispers in your ear, "But I thought you were always telling us that we cannot purify ourselves, and that the Holy Spirit of God is the great purifier of men's hearts." Very well, and so He is. But I will tell you something else that He is. He is the giver of all life. Without Him not a seed springs up from the soil into organized vitality. Well, then, suppose you listen to the tempter here also. Suppose this winter—suppose the coming spring—you save yourselves the trouble of sowing your fields; would not this be to reason like a madman? And what better is that other reasoning, by which you are deluding yourself into escaping the trouble of self-purification? God's blessed Spirit is ever ready to help

us ; His strength is our strength in the act of self-purifying ; the soul that forms a desire for purity of purpose, purity of thought, purity of deed, is helped by Him in the very act of forming that desire ; is helped by Him in every step of the upward struggle. He holds the hand where the path is difficult ; He lifts us over the dangerous places ; He steadies the turning head and nerves the fainting heart, as we clamber upward ; self-purification is God's purification of us. And again, notice that there is no exception to the need of this. We have none of us done purifying ourselves, so that we can say " These words are not for me." Our Lord, in speaking to His disciples at the end of His course on earth ; nay, in commenting on an act of His own towards them, used a very forcible and plain similitude to explain the matter



to us. It was derived from the use of the bath, so universal in that Eastern country. "He that has bathed," said our Lord, "has no further need except to wash his feet, for otherwise he is entirely clean;" *i. e.*, when he comes out of the bath and reaches his home, or goes about his business, although the entire body is clean, having just been bathed, yet must he from time to time cleanse off the constant pollution of the dust of the road along which he travels. And so, my brethren, is it with us. We have been washed from the stain of our birth sin, and made children of God; but we daily and hourly incur pollution in the world, and we constantly need this washing of the feet, this self-purifying. And now, as to the manner how. Resolutions will not do it; even constant watchfulness, though a necessary condition for



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carrying on the work, will not of itself accomplish it. If we have an urgent matter in hand, staying up all night will not further it, unless our hands be employed about it. And how to be so employed? God, my brethren, has provided us with the instruments of cleansing. Be sober, and watch unto prayer. Draw nigh unto God with the desire of the heart, and He will draw nigh unto you with His Almighty grace. And where is the place to pray? Doubtless, everywhere; at all times, in the work of self-purifying, the heart must turn its face and send up its voice to God. But what is the *best* place to pray in? Many places are good, and favour prayer. Kneeling at the bedside, alone in the stillness, we fall into the very attitude and thoughts of prayer. Husband and wife kneeling there together, friend with friend,

brother with sister, pass the bonds of pleading love round the scattered thoughts of prayer, and bind them so that they are not easily rent asunder. At the table where is spread the family morning meal, in the room where none knows at night whether all may meet to-morrow, these are blessed and hallowed places of prayer, and from each of these may spring forth the fountain of purity over the heart of life. But of all places for prayer, this, God's house, is the best. Prayer in the church is the purest, the holiest, the least selfish of all prayer. He who would purify himself comes here to draw water out of the wells of salvation ; comes here to suffer the word of exhortation which may give him encouragement ; comes here, above all, for that application to himself of the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament of His

own appointing, whereby the life of purity and holiness is nourished within. Here every word speaks of Him ; His pattern is ever before us, His commands are the law which rules us. He that would purify himself seeks above all for the grace of His ordinances in the assembly of His people.

And need I say to you, my brethren, that we are close upon one of the greatest occasions of meeting Him here ? Need I remind you, that for those who would purify themselves as He is pure, a new course is beginning of commemoration of all He said and did and became from His cradle to His Ascension and the fulfilment of the Father's promise ? Let us keep this Christmas as being children of God, as not knowing indeed what we shall be, but in the hope of seeing Him as He is one

day, and being like Him ; and wrought on by that blessed hope to cleanse ourselves in flesh and spirit and perfect holiness in the fear of God.



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