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James B. Juxton

PARISH SERMONS:

BY

REV. JARVIS BARRY BUXTON,

LATE RECTOR OF ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, FAYETTEVILLE, N. C.

"Though Divine truths are to be received equally from every minister alike, yet it must be acknowledged that there is something (we know not what to call it) of a more acceptable reception of those who at first were the means of bringing men to God, than of others."—LEIGHTON.

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TO THE
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THESE DISCOURSES
OF
THEIR AFFECTIONATE FRIEND AND PASTOR,
WHEREIN BEING DEAD HE YET SPEAKETH,
Are Respectfully Inscribed.

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P R E F A C E .

THE following Sermons by the late Rev. J. B. Buxton, were preached in the discharge of ordinary parochial duty, without the remotest view to publication, so far as is known.

But friends there are who would not willingly let die all memorial of their Pastor's pulpit ministrations. These have advised a selection out of his numerous manuscripts, to be embraced in a volume; and, to the best of my judgment, I have endeavored to execute that responsible task.

It is thought that the Sermons here collected, composing the first published Book of Sermons by a Parish Priest of the Diocese of North Carolina, will convey a true impression of the general style and tone of thinking of the revered and lamented author.

J. B.

Ashville, N. C., 1851.



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Preached at an Ordination to the Priesthood.

“For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee; but the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee.”—Ezek. iii. 5, 6. 494

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LIFE UNDER THE GOSPEL NEITHER CLEAR NOR DARK.

Preached on the Sunday following the Death of a venerable Communicant.

- “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear nor dark: but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light.”—Zech. xiv. 6, 7. 645

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- “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?”—Acts xxvi. 8. 659

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE.

REV. JARVIS B. BUXTON was born at Newbern, N. C., January 17th, 1792. His father, Jarvis Buxton, was a native of Mold, county of Flint, in the Principality of Wales, but had removed to North Carolina some time before the war of the Revolution broke out. His mother's maiden name was Ursula Barry, born in French Switzerland, and whose family had emigrated to this country for the purpose of raising silk, but the attempt not answering expectation, it was abandoned. At the time of her death, her only son, Jarvis, was fifteen years old. His father died three years afterward. Both parents lie interred in the old grave-yard in the town of Newbern, beneath the same tombstone.

The following letter, kindly communicated by Rev. Dr. F. L. Hawks, contains, in substance, all that can be gathered concerning the early years of the subject of this memoir.

New-York, June 14th, 1851.

REV. AND DEAR SIR :—

In reply to your note, I will cheerfully communicate now what little I know that may be useful. I fear it will not be worth much to you. First, of your grandparents. I have seen them both, but was a little boy when they died. I was at your grandfather's funeral. His memory is intimately associated with my earliest recollections of our Church in Newbern. The Rev. Mr. Irving was our rector; and at that early time we adhered to the old English fashion of having a clerk. Your grandfather acted for us in that capacity, and sat in a small desk immediately under the reading desk. He

led us in the responses, and announced the psalms to be sung; and whenever he gave out the 100th Psalm, he always added, "to its own proper tune," meaning thereby Old Hundred.* He and your grandmother were both highly respected in our little community, and reared their children (of whom I never knew more than two, your father and a sister Fanny, who afterward married Mr. Henry M. Cooke) piously in the Church.

Your father was a few years older than I, and we, in common with most of the lads in the town, went to school to Mr. Irving, the rector, an excellent classical and mathematical teacher. Your father was reading the higher classical authors when I was but in my Latin grammar. He was a docile and obedient boy, and bore a good character for attention to his studies and scholarship. At length he left, and was sent by your grandfather to the north; in due time I also was sent to the university, so that I lost sight of your father for some years. On my return home after my college career, I found him settled in Newbern as a merchant. I entered on the study of law; my mind, however, was very much occupied on the subject of religion, owing under God to the early training of my mother, who was then dead. Your father was at that time a decidedly religious man, and congeniality of taste and sentiment brought us much together, so that in fact we became intimate. The Church was then in a sad state of depression in North Carolina. Mr. Irving had left Newbern; we had no services for some time, and in truth but three parishes in the whole State had an existence. In Fayetteville, the Rev. Bethel Judd had gathered a parish, and it was in its infancy. At Edenton, old Mr. Collins had repaired the church at his own expense, but there was no clergyman there. The truth is, we were a poor little scattered handful in North Carolina. The Methodists were very numerous, and the Presbyterians were growing. In Newbern, the Methodists had drawn in many of the descendants of old Church families—for they frequently had on that station

* He officiated as a reader and clerk of the church for more than forty years.

pious preachers of more than usual ability, and now and then one of more than ordinary learning and attainments. The church was often shut; once we had a clergyman who lost confidence by his conduct; he left, and we were at a low ebb. Your father often attended the Methodist meetings, nay, I may say at one time, entirely. He was intimate in some very respectable families who had gone over to Methodism; and he frequented with them private prayer meetings, &c., until he had well nigh become a Methodist. Our intimacy, however, continued; and sometimes I went on Sunday to the Methodist meeting because I had nowhere else to go, for our destitution of religious privileges in the Episcopal Church was awful. About this time, and with matters in this position, the Rev. J. C. Clay, now of Pennsylvania, was invited to come among us, and he it was who, in fact, did more than any other clergyman before him to revive the Church in Newbern. And now it was that the conversations referred to in your note between your father and myself about Methodism occurred. I did not then understand the history of Methodism in its details; but I was of Church parents and loved the Church; while at the same time I was constrained to admit that it had not of late years exhibited much earnest, devoted piety in North Carolina; and its want of piety and zeal was your father's strong ground against remaining in it. All I could do was to urge upon him his duty and mine as baptized children of the Church. The Prayer Book he loved, and admitted that there was no lack of religion in that. On this foundation, I argued that our duty was plain to abide by the Church. If she provided for the warmest personal piety in all her appointments, the impiety of individuals was no reason for withdrawing from her. Besides, I had (I hardly know why) a firm conviction that God was about to raise the Church from the dust. Your father and I were the only two young men in the town openly professing to be religious who were recognized as belonging to the Episcopal Church. There were other young men nominal Episcopalians, and since very consistent and zealous ones, but we alone were communicants among our young men. I hence urged upon him the duty devolving on us both to remain and endeavor

to show in our lives that the Church did not make cold formalists; but that the most earnest, warm-hearted, zealous, and enlightened Christianity, was not only *tolerated* in the Church, but actually encouraged by acting up to the spirit of her formularies and abiding by her institutions and appointments. I told him God called on us, I thought, to assist in living down the prejudices against the Church. At that time neither of us had read enough to know much about Episcopacy, the ministry, &c. We both knew that a Bishop was deemed a proper and necessary officer, that he ordained, but the *why* and *wherefore* we really did not know. So we had no discussions about the so-called Episcopate of Methodism. Mr. Clay was of service to your father;* he was so consistent, earnest, and zealous, that it was obvious enough we need not leave the Church to find warm-hearted religion. Mr. Clay left us, however, and was succeeded by Dr. R. S. Mason, then a young man like ourselves. He was very active and diligent, and he also understood very well the constitution and ministry of the Church. Your father, at last, was perfectly convinced that he could not without sin leave the Church. This is substantially what I can recollect about his tendency to Methodism. I recollect also that he became informed before I did on the views of the Church as to Episcopacy and the ministry, and he it was who first put me on the inquiry and examination which brought me on my way out of the churchmanship of mere birth, habit and education, into that which rested on Scripture and antiquity.

Your father's character for purity and consistency as a re-

* Dr. Clay, in a letter dated June 30, 1851, writes— " My residence in Newbern was only about one year, viz., from the early part of the year 1817 to the beginning of the year following. During that time I had the pleasure of making your father's acquaintance, and have a very distinct recollection of him, and of the high regard I entertained for him as a gentleman of great worth and excellence of character. He was at that time I think in the mercantile business. I recollect the predilection he then had for the Methodists; though in conversations I had with him on the subject of religion, I strongly indulged the hope, which was afterwards realized, that he would not feel satisfied until he had permanently connected himself with our Apostolical Church. . . . I was not surprised to learn, some few years afterwards, that he had been admitted to Deacon's Orders in the Church, for usefulness in whose ministry his talents and piety seemed to be so eminently adapted."

ligious young man stood high in the town. He was very kind to the poor, though not rich himself. I remember his writing in the form of dialogue a religious tract, (a very good one too,) to raise money by the sale of it for the relief of a poor old woman (blind, I think) who was one of our communicants. Her name was McCartney. I know that he possessed the confidence and affection of Bishop Ravenscroft.

Mr. Buxton left Newbern after his marriage in 1819, and went to reside in Beaufort county, where after a few years he became a candidate for Holy Orders. The following notice of him occurs in the first Annual Address of Bishop Ravenscroft to the Diocesan Convention of 1824.—“Here I must take leave to remark, that the lively condition of these two congregations, (at Zion Chapel and at Bath,) and the deep interest felt for the revival of the Church, is owing, under God, to the zealous and persevering and discreet exertions of the two lay readers who officiate amongst them, Mr. Buxton and Mr. Marsh, aided by the occasional visits of the Rev. Mr. Mason; an example which I trust will be fruitful in encouraging others to go and do likewise.”

On the 9th day of December, 1827, at Elizabeth City, he was admitted to Deacon's Orders by Bishop Ravenscroft, who also consecrated the new church upon the same occasion, and the newly ordained deacon was forthwith invested with the charge of the parish. Here he continued till his removal to Fayetteville in the year 1831. Before entering upon this last charge, his own bishop, the venerable Ravenscroft, having deceased the year previous, Mr. Buxton visited Richmond for the purpose of receiving Priest's Orders at the hands of Bishop Moore. In St. John's Church of that city, he was ordained to the priesthood on the 8th of May, 1831. It appears from two letters of Bishop Moore, that the bishop, a year or two before, had been desirous of procuring his services as assistant in the Monumental Church. In the first, under date of January 14th, 1830, Bishop Moore requested “a visit, in order to ascertain whether himself and the congregation would be pleased with each other, and whether a settlement in that city would be agreeable to himself.” From the tenor of the bishop's

second letter, it might be inferred that his correspondent, with characteristic independence, though willing to accept a positive call, had declined submitting his official ministrations to the judgment of the congregation. "I can very fully enter into your feelings, Rev. and dear Sir," are the bishop's words, "in relation to your visiting this city prior to the reception of a positive call, but as I have never heard you but once, and as the congregation have never heard you at all, I think it would be most prudent both in you and myself that you should take a view of the parish, and that the people should have an opportunity of listening to your public labors. If it was a measure out of the common course of things, I should not have proposed it to you; but as it seldom happens that a congregation invite a minister whom they have never heard, I can see no necessity for your scruples on the occasion. I must therefore repeat my wish to see you in Richmond, when if you please the congregation as much as you pleased me in Norfolk, I have no doubt you would be invited to fill the vacancy occasioned by the resignation of Mr. Croes."

Providence, however, had cast my father's lot within his own native State, and appointed his labors for the benefit of the then struggling but growing diocese of North Carolina.

On Sunday, May 15th, 1831, he preached his first sermon in St. John's Church, Fayetteville, the scene of his after life-long labors, from the fifth verse of the tenth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel.* The Convention which elected Rev. Dr. Ives to the Episcopate of North Carolina met during the same week at Raleigh. The Sunday following his return from that Convention, and just after the morning service had concluded, the great fire broke out whose devastating flames swept into ruin the town of Fayetteville. The house of God shared in the general calamity, and was laid low in ashes. At this crisis of the parish fortunes, the rector did not shrink from the providential duties which had now so unexpectedly devolved upon him. The afflicted parish, deprived of all resources within itself, at once determined upon an appeal to the Christian sympathies and charity of more favored brethren,

* See an extract from this Sermon at the end of the Memoir.

and commissioned their pastor to bear it abroad. This cheerless task he undertook out of pure sense of duty. He thought that Providence had foreseen the day of calamity, and through his instrumentality had provided a way of relief. But often in after life, while recounting in his graphic manner the varied hardships and cold repulses from a bleak charity which befell him during the prosecution of his task, would he say, "that it was the most trying period of his life, and that no human being could go through what he had then suffered more than once." At the same time, he would warmly commemorate the many kindnesses he had received from open-hearted and open-handed friends at the North, who never tired in sympathy and good deeds in behalf of their afflicted brethren in the South. With the moneys collected by him, after an absence of six months, amounting to \$7,600, a new church was erected on the site of the old, and consecrated to the service of Almighty God on the 13th of January, 1833.*

* The following lines, never before in print, were written by Mrs. Sigourney the poetess, and presented to the rector of St. John's while sojourning with her in Hartford.

APPEAL TO CHRISTIANS FOR THE CHURCH AT FAYETTEVILLE.

1.

Our consecrated home,
Of heavenly hope the sphere,
Dear are the fragments of its dome,
Its calcined stones are dear.

2.

God in his judgments came,
The proudest spirits bow'd ;
His path was 'mid devouring flame,
His footsteps in the cloud.

3.

Churches of Christ, arise !
Your sister weepeth sore—
Homeless and desolate she sighs,
Who can her joys restore ?

4.

With sympathetic zeal
Allay her mournful fears,
And let your love her sorrows heal,
Your bounty dry her tears.

5.

Rebuild her courts of praise,
Beauty for ashes bring,

It does not fall within the design of this biographical sketch to chronicle minutely either the personal or the parochial history of my revered father. That record is on high, and read of the angels. Never did man realize more truly the responsibility of the sacred office, and the utter insufficiency of human ability, without the grace of Christ, in the work of the ministry. And it pleased God to bless his ministry in a remarkable manner. Often has the large proportion of young persons of both sexes numbered within the communion of St. John's Church, been a subject of remark by his brethren of the clergy. Seldom indeed will that young man be found who has succeeded in growing up to manhood under his pastoral eye, without having been led to make a public confession of the name of Christ. While genial in manner, and human in sympathy, none possessed a higher moral courage constantly to speak the truth, and boldly to rebuke vice—"to reprove, to exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine."* But the wounds inflicted were ever the faithful wounds of a friend, which made his own heart bleed responsively with secret anguish. Benevolence of heart was, perhaps, one of his most prominent, natural traits; this was heightened and sanctified by grace. The poor of the town and parish will ever confess that they lost in him a friend in need; and the tossing pains of sick and dying beds will long miss the lips that used to drop comfort through the blood of the Lamb, and the heart that never closed against human sorrows.

Habitual trust in Providence, and submissiveness to the Divine will, also strongly marked his religious character.

In a letter, addressed in 1832 to one of his sons, then a lad at school, under the charge of the Rev. Dr. Muhlenberg, he

And bid her organ's tuneful lays
From silent ruin spring.

6.

So from your altars fair
May richer incense rise;
And thence the hallow'd wing of prayer
Prevailing cleave the skies.

Hartford, Ct., July 20, 1831.

* 2 Tim. iv. 2.

wrote—"I am thankful on being able to assure you, that the prevalence of that dreadful scourge, the cholera, in the northern sections of our country, has afforded to me no ground of uneasiness on your account. I have daily commended you to the protection of Almighty God, and have felt easy under the comfortable assurance that the will of your Heavenly Parent respecting you would be wise and merciful, whether found in your preservation or in selecting you as a victim to that fell destroyer. Press your studies, my dear boy, and improve your mind by reading valuable books. Above all, remember your Heavenly Parent, whose tender mercies are over you, and the Redeemer, your only sure refuge from the evils of this present world. Let no considerations of pleasure or profit seduce your affections from God, or tempt you to violate his law. Let your private prayers be regular and devout; for without the blessing of Heaven, all your fine opportunities will serve to no purpose but to increase your guilt."

In the last few years of his life he became sensibly more deeply impressed with the importance of sacredly observing in parishes the times and seasons appointed by the Prayer Book. The season of Lent, especially, was to him a hallowed season, and its solemn call seemed borne to him from that wilderness where the Saviour fasted and was tempted of the devil, and where the Christian, too, must abide his time in penitential humiliation. "Should it be asked," he said, in a late sermon upon this subject, "through what instrumentality or rare circumstance our mind has been awakened to the importance of keeping the Holy Days, so wisely appointed by the ancient Church, and so faithfully held by our own, we answer: the recent agitation and alarm within the Church on both sides the Atlantic, and the disastrous consequences which have befallen many in their melancholy deflection from her communion. It was early foreseen by judicious writers, both in this and in another country, that whatever the effect of existing disturbance might be in respect of many, yet the great body of the Church would be bettered thereby in being roused from a state of apathy, and, under God, incited to a deeper devotedness of spirit. This opinion, indeed, was in the liveliest sympathy with our own. We then believed, and

still believe, that amidst much seemingly calculated to cloud the prospects and depress the mind of the Church, there was much more in the voice of Inspiration, and on the page of Church history, to quiet natural apprehensions, to quicken holy living, and to comfort the heart. The troubles which endure for a night, are wont to be succeeded by the morning's illumination and joy. Times of invigorated prosperity are preceded by those of adversity and darkness. God, alone, bringeth light out of thick clouds, and maketh the wrath of man to praise him. But then we must aim, under grace, to be rightly exercised thereby. We must not allow ourselves to fret because of the ungodly. We must not surrender our minds to gloom and despondence, much less to discontent and disaffection. The true servant of the Redeemer, on such occasion, will search out and try his own ways; and wherein he may have fallen short, he will seriously endeavor to turn again with renewed purpose of heart, and with an invigorated spirit of obedience. Neither as members of Christ's body, must we be carried away, or be betrayed into any misjudgment of ourselves, or lulled into dangerous repose, by one-sided views of evils which have befallen others. Alas! it is possible they had been wiser, had we ourselves been more faithful."

But as a minister of God, intrusted with cure of souls in a far wider sphere than within parish bounds, "not by ordination consecrated unto place but unto function,"* did he ever carry abroad with him the spirit and unction of his holy office. Possessed of a wonderful conversational power on religious subjects, he would invariably draw around him the family group, and by his winning style and suavity of manner, interest both old and young in the serious things of God and eternity. Often, too, has the writer been struck with admiration at his singular felicity of introducing religious topics with persons casually met by the roadside, and been made to feel, with the wise man, a word spoken in due season to the weary, and by a good man, how good is it! One instance of his fearless obedience to the providential calls of duty, where-

* Hooker, V. lxxx. 6.

ever he might be, may here be given. He was on his way to the last General Convention held in Cincinnati, when the cholera broke out on board the boat. Its single victim, an officer of the boat, lay writhing in agony, deserted by all but himself. He alone ministered medicine, spiritual as well as bodily, to the poor sufferer, who in a short time, however, expired.

But it was as a visitor of prisoners under sentence of death that the faithful assiduities of the pastor of St. John's were also eminently successful. Thoroughly conversant with the mazes of the human heart, he won his way at once to the confidence of guilt. The condemned wretch felt he had found a friend, and hastened to unbosom himself of his pent-up woes. He has been known to travel sixty miles over heavy sands, to meet a convict at his own request. At the very period of his last illness, he was engaged in visitation upon a criminal, under sentence of the law for blood-guiltiness, who was executed the week following his own death, after having been prepared under his guidance for the Holy Communion. It was a general rule with him never to visit officially a person accused of a capital crime, till after conviction in regular course of law. His appeals then to the conscience, under the impending judgment of God, were almost irresistible. His own view of capital punishment, as a merciful ordainment of Almighty God for the soul of the offender, besides being a righteous vindication of the sanctity of human life, was thus strongly expressed—"Capital punishment is a means of grace, which, for the remission of scarlet sin, God hath instituted and ordained, and for the administration of which the Church has provided."

As a clergyman of the diocese of North Carolina, the rector of St. John's enjoyed universally the confidence and affection of his brethren in the ministry.* By one of the oldest of the

* At a meeting of the Bishop and Clergy of the Convention, the following commemorative resolutions were passed.

"Whereas it has pleased Almighty God in his wise providence, by a sudden death to deprive this parish and the diocese at large of the valuable and efficient services of our departed brother: Resolved, that acknowledging the hand of Divine wisdom, we bow with submission to this chastening dispensation

clergy, he was styled emphatically "the Presbyterian-Father of the diocese."

For many years he shared the most responsible offices within the diocese, and at the Convention of 1850, he was made, by common consent, chairman of the most important committee ever constituted within our bounds. No subject of general interest to the Church occupied his attention more than the increase of our native clergy. His views upon the subject of ministerial education, were submitted years ago before the Diocesan Convention, in a sermon preached at the special request of his bishop. Its topic was "Designation to the Ministry," and the writer advocated as a starting-point for such education, the setting apart of children by some formal act of the Church, through her bishops, in the way of commendation to God, for the grace of the ministry; and under the full consciousness and moral weight of this early gracious, yet authoritative designation to a Divine office, he would have had children trained up in the family and church school. Analogous in principle to this method, he urged, was the Divine designation of the first-born in the Patriarchal Age, and afterward, of the tribe of Levi in their stead, who grew up, even from the dawn of reason, under the moralizing influence of their destined calling. Of course, such a method in the Christian Church could be intended only to act morally and persuasively upon the human mind, and to solicit "the inward moving by the Holy Ghost,"* for assuming in proper time the sacred office and ministration.

Respecting the theological position of the pastor of St. John's, little need be said on a point so well understood amongst his friends. Trained during his candidateship under

Resolved, That while in the loss of our departed brother, we mourn our social deprivation, as well as the loss to the diocese, and to his own parish, we sorrow not as those who have no hope, but are consoled with the firm and abiding trust, that in being removed from his labors on earth, he has gone to his rest, and finally to those rewards which, through the merits of the Redeemer, are laid up for the just—to the enjoyment of the special blessings which are promised to those who turn many to righteousness. Resolved, That with heartfelt sympathy, we offer our condolences to the afflicted family of our much-loved brother."

* The ordering of Deacons.

the venerable Ravenscroft, the teachings of that admirable man early commended themselves to his inmost mind and conscience, and all his subsequent studies tended to fix more firmly his convictions of truth.

The Divine origin and intent of the Church as the revealed method of partaking in the mediation of Christ; the value of the sacraments under this gracious economy to the believing and penitent soul; the mystery of the Christian priesthood; the distinctive position of the Church at whose altar he ministered, "truly Protestant, only because truly Catholic"—all these grave subjects had long been passed upon by the clearest verdict of his mature judgment. He remarked upon one occasion, "We have a twofold duty to perform in the preservation of the Church's integrity in frame and principle—not merely that we ourselves may be saved through this appointed way, but that a distracted world, when put to flight, may find in the Church a refuge in distress, worthy of their Maker, worthy of their Redeemer, worthy of that blessed Spirit, who presides within the body of Christ. Charity to a distracted world forbids that we should in the least impair the integrity of Church principles, or invalidate them by our inconsistent behavior."

Upon another occasion, in reference to the danger of overstating Church principles, he made the further remark—"Were we to recite in a few words the history of any particular heresy, we should say, it was once an important truth, but little dwelt on in a preceding age, and gradually lost sight of, till revived at length and pushed, by men of strong feelings and subtle intellects, far out into ultraism." But, although so decided in his Church views, no man, beyond their pale, was ever more respected than himself, and, even more affectionately regarded among the various denominations of Christians. And the well-known reason was, because *he held the truth in love*, regarding himself as the friend of all men—as the enemy of none; and these kindly feelings were warmly reciprocated. The excellent Presbyterian and Baptist ministers of the place were both by his bed-side at the time of his death. Indeed, the acrid spirit of controversy was ever abhorrent to his nature. His office was that of a Divinely-commissioned teacher.

“I stand here, not to debate, but to expound the doctrines of our holy religion,” he once declared in a sermon upon Infant Baptism. “If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant. If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.”

It may be added, before closing these remarks, that on no account would he consent to part with the phrase “real presence” applied to Christ’s spiritual presence in the Eucharist, in opposition to a mere figurative, unreal, or Zuinglian presence, grounded on the old Marcionite heresy, however, discreetly refraining from the use of that phrase, where he thought there was danger of being misunderstood, or of giving offence to weak or ill-informed minds. On this point, it need hardly be said, he was justified by the example and authority of the soundest American and English Divines.*

* “What is the inward part or thing signified? *Ans.*—The body and blood of Christ, which are verily and indeed (*verè et realiter*) taken and received by the faithful in the Lord’s Supper.”—*Catechism of the Church of England*.

“As usual, Dr. Milner *assumes* the very point to be proved. He confounds the Doctrine of the Real Presence with Transubstantiation,” p. 176. . . . “All the quotations which Dr. Milner produces, or to which he refers, from St. Ignatius in the Apostolic Age ‘to the illustrious doctors of the fourth and fifth ages,’ prove that the doctrine of the Real Presence is Primitive and Catholic, but do not prove that Transubstantiation is so,” p. 187. . . . “I admit that the testimonies of which Dr. Milner speaks, prove the belief of the Real Presence, but not the belief of Transubstantiation, in the Ancient Church, &c.” p. 189, also 191.—*Dr. Jarvis’s Reply to Milner’s End of Controversy*.—New-York, 1847.

“Milner is obliged to confess that the genuine doctrine of the Church of England is that of the Real Presence [but not such as is corporal or organical, that is, according to the known and earthly mode of existence of a body]. He refers in proof to the Catechism, Articles, Ritual, and Homilies, and to Ridley, Nowell, Bilson, Andrewes, Bramhall, &c., and to Cleaver, bishop of Chester, who says (Sermon, Nov., 25th, 1787), ‘The great object of our Reformers was, whilst they acknowledge the Doctrine of the Real Presence, to refute that of Transubstantiation;’ as it was afterwards to refute the notion of Impanation or Consubstantiation.”—*Palmer on the Church*. Vol. i. p. 489, note.

“That Christ Jesus our Lord is truly present and received in the blessed Sacrament of his Body and Blood, is so clear and universally agreed upon, that he can be no Christian that doubts it. . . . Every simple act of faith feeds on Christ, but here by virtue of that necessary union which our Saviour’s institution hath made between the sign and the thing signified, the faithful communicant doth partake of Christ in a more peculiar manner. . . . And, conclude we resolutely, that there is no truth in divinity more clear than this of Christ’s

Little more remains within the plan of this sketch, than to advert to the circumstances under which the faithful minister of God was called to finish his course. Himself had often given utterance to the wish that, if it were God's good pleasure, his last illness might terminate speedily. His desire was granted. But for months before his death, a gloom of spirit, noticed with concern, and often spoken of by members of his family, seemed to overcloud his uniform cheerfulness. Often would he speak of resigning his parish, and spending the remnant of his days in the Missionary Department of the diocese. A day or two before his violent and fatal attack, he had summed up his labors in the parish to the close of the twentieth year of his rectorship.* The paper containing this summary was found in the parish register, and handed to the secretary, after the adjournment of the Convention, for pub-

gracious exhibition, and our faithful reception of Him in the blessed Sacrament."—*Hall, Bishop of Norwich*. Epistle LVI.

"Christ's body being a part of that nature which whole nature is presently joined unto Deity wheresoever Deity is, it followeth that his bodily substance hath every where a presence of true conjunction with Deity. And forasmuch as it is by virtue of that conjunction made the body of the Son of God, by whom also it was made a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, this giveth it a presence of force and efficacy throughout all generations of men."—*Hooker, Eccl. Pol. V. lv. 9.*

From these most certain truths of the substantial verity of our Lord's manhood, and of the indivisibility of his person, subsisting in the essence of the One Deity, Hooker elsewhere declares, "These holy mysteries received in due manner do also impart unto us, even in true and real, though *mystical* manner, the very person of our Lord Himself, whole, perfect, and entire, as hath been showed."—*Eccl. Pol. V. lxxvii. 8.* Afterward, speaking of the sentence of antiquity, he says (II.), "As evident it is how they teach that Christ is *personally* there present, yea, present whole, albeit a part of Christ be *corporally* absent from thence; that, Christ assisting this heavenly banquet with His personal and true presence, &c." Indeed, the mystery of that saying 'Filius hominis est in sacramento,' rightly interpreted, is not greater than that contained in our Lord's own declaration *while on earth*, 'Filius hominis est in cœlo.' *St. John, iii. 13.*

Faith is the evidence of things not understood *in their manner*, as well as of things not seen in their substance.

* The following is the succession of rectors before him in the parish of St. John's, Fayetteville.

1. Rev. Bethel Judd, under whom a congregation was organized in the spring of 1817, and the corner stone of the church laid in the same year.

2. Rev. Gregory Bedell, who took charge in October, 1818, and the first

lication in the journal, where it may be seen. He died on Friday, May 30th, 1851, being in the sixtieth year of his age. Most deeply touched by this afflictive stroke were the hearts of his attached people. The Convention of the diocese was holding its annual session at that time in the parish. That body immediately adjourned upon the announcement of his death; and, upon reassembling, affectionately commemorated by resolutions their departed brother. The Great Head of the Church did not see fit to spare His servant to witness in that Convention, the restoration of harmony to the diocese, an event which he had so much at heart, but chose rather, in adorable wisdom, to make his own death no unimportant instrument for effecting so happy a result. And indeed it seemed so ordered by a good Providence, in whose sight the death of saints is precious, that the servant of Christ, having done what was given unto him to do, should fall asleep in the presence, and, as it were, in the arms of his wife and children, and assembled brethren in the communion of saints. He sleeps now in the church-yard, in the hope of the just, and over his grave the shadow of the church, at whose altar he ministered the fifth of a century, gently falls at the evening hour. *Felix, non vite tantum sanctitate sed etiam opportunitate mortis.*

Conclusion of the Sermon preached in St. John's Church, May 15th, 1831, from St. Luke x. 5.—“And into whatsoever house, &c.”

“Ah! ye peaceable servants of the Redeemer, ye have here no continuing city; no privileged spot upon which you may retire from the changes and chances inseparable from

service in the church was on Christmas day of that year.—Resigned in April, 1822.

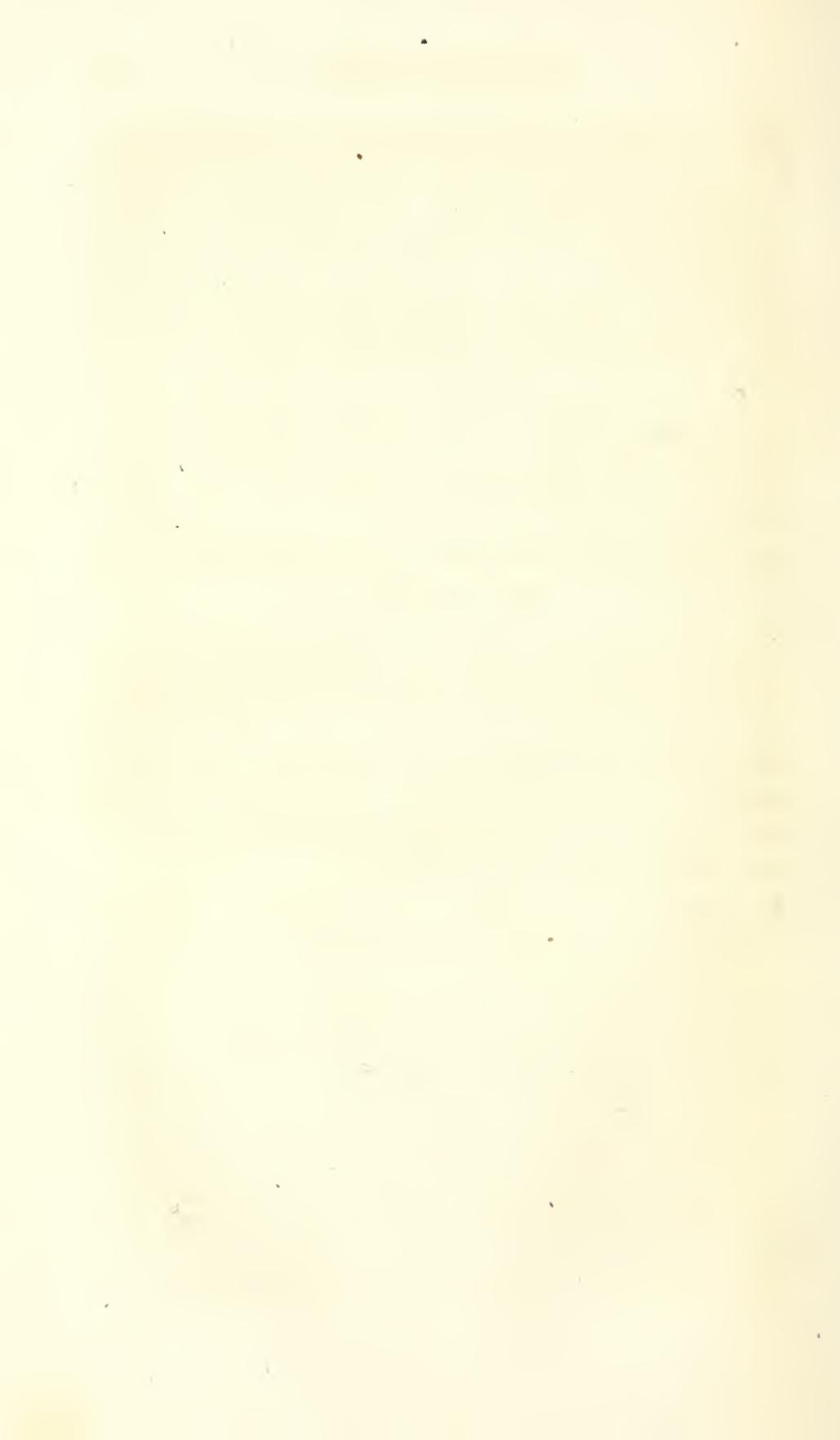
3. Rev. William Hooper, rector until July, 1824.

4. Rev. Henry M. Mason, called March 1825. Resigned, August, 1827.

5. Rev. Philip B. Wiley, in charge from January, 1828, to November, 1829.

6. Rev. W. G. H. Jones, who took charge in March, 1830, and resigned in the spring of 1831.

your mortal state ; to-day, the peace and tranquillity of your souls may flow as a river ; but to-morrow, you must drink at a stream, scanty and perturbed. Yea, who can say what even a day may bring forth ?—In the morning, the enlivening promise from God's comforting truth may gild the mansion of your hope with its sacred lustre ; but, in the evening, the consciousness of guilt with its gloomy shadow may overspread your soul with disquieting apprehension. You shall find no peace but in the performance of your first works ; your humble penitent confession unto Almighty God, with a thankful remembrance of your Advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for your sins. Oh ! let not any be unwise to-day, but understanding what the will of the Lord is, let the mild and benevolent salutation of 'Peace' by a merciful Redeemer, be met in every bosom with corresponding emotions. Let every heart reply—'Even so, Lord—thy kingdom of righteousness, and joy, and peace be established within my breast, now and for ever.' And as for me, God forbid that in this place, and upon this occasion, my heart should cease to respond to the kind injunction of Him that sent me. Yea, in the name of my Lord, I greet this family of the Lord Jesus. Peace be to this house—peace to all that dwell within its sacred courts—peace spiritual—peace with all men—peace at last, perfect in the fruition, eternal in the duration."



PARISH SERMONS.



SERMON I.

THE ADVENT OF CHRIST THE JOY AND CONSOLATION OF THE FAITHFUL.

“And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”—Is. xxv. 9.

THIS inspiring passage shows us how the ancient servants of God, while under their troubles, were sustained and comforted in a lively anticipation of a happier day. The advent of the promised Messiah was emphatically the consolation of ancient Israel. Abraham afar off, saw his day, and gathered joy to his heart. It was that grand event, the expectation of which, while it interested the world at large, had inspirited also the souls of the Prophets and kindled their celestial fire. It was that new and felicitous era, in prospect of which, their pious songs rose into strains of rapture, while all nature in full sympathy, threw open her richest stores of descriptive imagery. “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of

Lebanon shall be given unto it: the excellency of Carmel and Sharon: they shall see the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty lands springs of water.”* And it shall be said in that day—“Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”

The leading sentiment here presented to our minds seems to be, that the Messiah’s advent would prove to the Church a standing occasion of spiritual joy.

In the first place, spiritual ignorance would disappear before the brightness of His coming. Consider the ignorance of the natural man in respect of God. “The world by wisdom knew not God.”† Not but that the existence of some great first cause—of some supreme intelligence—might not be reasonably inferred from the light of nature; but all that light, cannot enable us to form a satisfactory opinion of the divine character and attributes. We see, indeed, many indications of goodness; but the appearances of evil on all sides round break in upon us. It appears plainly to be a mixed state of things we live under, in which evil vastly preponderates. We can discover but very faint, if indeed any traces at all, of providential discrimination. “All things come alike to all. There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked.”‡ Neither the descending ray nor the descending shower discerns between the righteous and the wicked. Reason staggers amidst the most painful uncertainties as she contemplates these things, and of herself must for ever have vacillated in doubt and indecision, because she can

* Is. xxxv. 1. 2. 7.

† 1 Cor. i. 21.

‡ Eccl. ix. 2.

never find evidence on which to rest, at all proportioned to the magnitude of the question at issue. Her conclusion is strictly recorded by David when he said, "Then thought I to understand this ; but it was too hard for me."* And how distressing is this vacillancy in respect of God ! Not knowing his attributes, into what presumption on one side, and into what discouragement on the other, is not the human mind liable to be precipitated ! While the prosperity of the wicked destroys them, the righteous are heard to exclaim : "Then have I cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocency." Tell us not of vague conjectures, or of the reasonings of mere philosophy in their application to the wants and apprehensions of our nature. These may meet the demands of a careless levity ; but will not content the mind of an honest inquirer after truth. This man wants a reasonable assurance from God himself, who only can relieve the doubts of a mind in earnest about truth. He wants assurance as to the character of the government under which he lives—he wants to know whether the hand of Omnipotence which is over him, rules or tyrannizes—whether he is to regard his Maker as an enemy that pursues him, or as a refuge in his distress. But when has reason or philosophy solved these interesting problems ? The heathen sage, indeed, reasoned well concerning the existence of a supreme cause, and from the visible creation inferred the Eternal Power and Godhead. From these just premises he derived many excellent lessons for the spirit and conduct of human life. But his precepts had neither the authority nor the obligation requisite in the case. They did not even deter-

* Ps. lxxiii. 16.

mine his own mind. He vacillated on points, in which, of all others, accuracy and decision were most essential to the peace of a rational mind. No, we may learn from our text, that it was reserved for Messiah's Advent to comfort the human mind with that very accurate knowledge of the Most High which its own circumstances required. "And it shall be said in *that* day, Lo! this is our God—and He will save us—this is the Lord—we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." And what is the nature of this discovery? Why it is, in effect, the discovery by a child of a long-lost parent, the kind Father of her spirit, who, when she had forfeited at once His favor and her own happiness, visited and redeemed her; who has followed her with affectionate solicitude through every stage of her devious career; rescued her feet by divers providences from hidden dangers and deaths; blocked up her way to self-immolation and ruin; and, finally, revealed Himself in the light of the Gospel to her understanding and heart. Such a revelation of God to the human mind as this, must when received fill that mind with consolation and joy. The knowledge of God and of His Son creates a new and cheering page in our history. It is the day-spring and day-star in a weary land; it is a bright resting-spot for the soul toiling under the curse of doubt and distraction. This is *my* God, she exclaims, and He will save me; this is my Lord, I will be glad and rejoice in His salvation!

Again, the Advent of the Son of God is preëminently an occasion of joy, because it dispels our ignorance of our own nature. Untaught by the revelations of the Gospel—and reason is on this point also thrown into confusion—of all mysteries to man, himself is the greatest. His very origin is wrapped up and sealed in thick folds

of uncertainty. With a soul within him, whose capacious reservoirs can be filled only from the secret springs of the eternal world, he combines also appetites and passions which too often have degraded him even below the irrational creation. He knows not at which most to wonder—the greatness of his powers, or the meanness of their tendencies—the excellency of his frame, or the degeneracy of his nature—the elevation of his understanding, or the corruption of his heart. A worm! an angel! There is a contrariety within himself which, when sought to be understood, is too hard for him. Whether he proceed from a benign or from a malignant source, he cannot say. If from a benign, he is met with the difficulty how to account for the evil susceptibilities and tendencies of his nature! If from a malignant source, how then shall he account for those mysterious lineaments of Heaven, which, however obscured, are not wholly obliterated even among the vilest of men? We need not extend this train of thought beyond the precincts of the present life. If all is mystery this side the grave, then with what distracting uncertainties must not reason press her inquiries beyond it! That our friends and neighbors are disappearing one after the other, we have but to open our eyes to see. That they leave behind only a cumbrous mass of mortality, we have had the fearful evidence before us. But what has become of that ethereal spirit which beamed in the eye and glowed in the heart, and for whose mere elementary state here below, so fearful and wonderful an organization as the body arose from the earth? Has that spirit ceased to be? or has it passed only, like the new-born, into a new form of existence, hastening through intermediate stages unto some final and unalterable state of perfection?

The heathen sage had thought to know this; he reasoned well, but it was too hard for him. Wearied in the greatness of his way and in the multiplying of words, he sat down by the well of wisdom, thirsty and unable to draw its waters. There are points on which God must speak. It must be so. The father must reveal to the child all the early and interesting events of its own history. What can be more natural? On this testimony children can rely, and on this testimony children *do* rely. "He that is of God heareth God's words."* And how satisfactory in relation to all that is profitable to be known, and in relation to these deeply interesting topics, is the light of the day which has opened upon us to bring life and immortality! The more we learn of our past history and of our future destination, the stronger incentives do we gather to humiliation before our God, and to the unfeigned love and adoration of his holy name. We may now sufficiently understand our own nature for all practical purposes—our creation. God is our Creator. The origin of sin is in us. An enemy hath done it. Our enemies are pointed out. We know them by name, their mark, their line of approach, and mode of attack. Our spiritual friend and ally is known also, his mark, and the voice of his words. Behold, the Lord is our shepherd; he is our defender, our deliverer. We need fear no evil. Greater is he that is for us than all that is against us. Such is the comfort or joy of the heart which proceeds from the light which the advent of the Son of God has shed upon the world. It is now our privilege to become well informed on all essential points necessary to be understood. The darkness is

* John viii. 47.

past. The true light now shineth, while its rays administer effectually to our enduring consolation. This happy effect of the Messiah's advent was foreseen and recorded in our text. "It shall be said in that day—Lo, this is our God; this is the Lord; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." Now, although spiritual ignorance was an insuperable difficulty with which men had to contend, yet, in the sense of guilt, they in reality had a source of positive distraction even still more tormenting. How distressing that spectacle when the poor heathen man, embittered in his very existence by the mysterious horrors of guilt, undertakes himself its expiation! See him as he violates the strongest and most sacred laws of nature. Mark his lips as they quiver under the most agonizing tortures of self-infliction. Mark, too, the little children, dear to his heart, yet goaded on by parental hands through hot burning coals. The distracting cry among the heathen has always been that with which the prophet introduces the King of Moab. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the High God?"* Nor can we wonder at this. We learn from the apostle that a principle of conscience which approves the good and condemns the evil, is universally felt, and that therefore an atonement offering for sin is inseparably connected with the substantial peace and joy of the heart. But however types of the atonement may have preceded the advent of the Son of God and ministered to faith, yet it is the actual light only of the dayspring from on high which has fully made manifest the true Lamb of God, the real sacrifice which taketh away the sin of the world.

* Micah vi. 6.

God, in parental love, hath provided himself with an expiatory victim. "He so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* Yes, "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we will rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

But, even had the true atonement offering been discovered, and the doctrine of the expiation of guilt been understood, still sin, though interrupted for a season, would have regained its power. What did the reasonings of Socrates and Plato avail when arrayed before the corruption of human nature? What, may we not ask, avail all the precepts of the Gospel, and all the light which that Gospel has dispensed, and all the sanctions by which that light is sustained, and all the solemn responsibilities imposed, when arrayed before the power of sin? Nothing. Nothing. They avail nothing. Scripture and experience prove that the Spirit of God only, by its renewing influence on our nature, administers the effectual antidote to the power of sin. The power of sin, let it be understood, has its seat in the ruins of our nature; but, as these ruins are repaired under the silent but progressive operations of that Spirit, so is the dominion of sin destroyed, so will holiness be perfected in the fear of God. But until this restoration to the image of God has been in some good degree effected—until our hearts have been made clean and a right spirit has been renewed within us, we shall never escape the bondage of corruption. The body of sin within us will never be destroyed. We shall *serve* sin. Its wages will be our wages, and un-

* John iii. 16.

less by a deep and bitter repentance the chain of consequential evil shall be here rent asunder, it will pursue us remorselessly beyond the grave. But no dire necessity exists to encounter these imminent hazards. As the Son of God gives the light we require, so is he able to effect the object of his mission. He came to sanctify by his Spirit the hearts and minds of those who believe in his name, and the Christian humbly, and confidingly, and joyfully, receives Christ in this saving office: "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." And what an important discovery is not the source of this deliverance—whence it comes to us! What a comfort is it to know that the power pledged for perfecting our holiness is the power of the almighty Spirit of Christ Jesus; and that whatever qualifications are needed to insure our ultimate approval and acceptance, may most certainly be realized through faith by all who now abide in the Lord.

Again: under the light of the day which has opened upon us, the most important discoveries have been made into the nature and design of the afflictions incident to our condition here. Previously to these discoveries, poor, afflicted humanity, at the very time in which, of all others, it most needed confidence in the divine love and favor, was supposed to be an object of the divine vengeance, pursued by a relentless power as a victim devoted to destruction. There are passages in the Book of Job which illustrate these erroneous sentiments, and show how they sharpened the arrows of adversity and mingled poison with her bitter cup. But the darkness is past. "It shall be

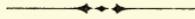
said in that day, Lo, this is our God; this is the Lord; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." We are now assured that a particular Providence watches over our affairs—that our very hairs are all numbered—that not a sparrow falleth to the ground without the will of our Heavenly Father. "The Lord is king, the earth may be glad thereof. The Lord is king, be the people never so impatient. He sitteth between the Cherubim, be the earth never so unquiet."* Nothing can befall us without his permission, and nothing will be permitted to befall us which he is not both able and willing to overrule to our permanent good. We learn, moreover, that afflictions originate not in the wrath but in the love of God. That they are requisite discipline for Heaven, as they are necessary means of our improvement in the virtues and graces of the divine life. "There are many principles in the human frame," says an eminent author, "many faculties of the mind, and many qualities of the heart, which would lie for ever latent, were they not called forth to action by the adversities of life." The remark is doubtless just. It is not to slumber on a couch that we were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, but to labor with our hands—to struggle with the tempest—to weather the winter of affliction—to endure hardness, and by Christian magnanimity, by patience, by perseverance, by invincible faith in God, to lay hold on that crown of glory which shineth in the heavens.

Finally, the light of the Advent day has wonderfully counterworked within the human mind its instinctive fears of death. Death, to the heathen sage, was a plunge into a dark, unfathomable unknown.

* Ps. xcvi. 1. Ps. xcix. 1.

And when, at this eventful crisis, amidst the pains of the body and the writhings of a guilty spirit, he stood hovering over the abyss, or took the dread leap, he had within his soul not one ray of consolation to cheer the surrounding gloom. All was conjecture, all was uncertainty. The address of the Roman emperor to his soul shadows forth the prevailing tone of heathen thought within the prospect of immediate dissolution. "O my soul, thou art leaving thy once loved haunts, thy former companions, and thy wonted joys; but into what unknown regions and dark abodes art thou now going? Alas! thou canst not tell!" O how consolatory to his mind might not one ray from the Gospel have proved! How blessed, had its celestial radiance fallen on his shadowed path! had the invisible world been opened before him—the scenes of its immortalities—the express images of its glories! How blessed, had he heard the happy sentence, sealed by the blood of the Cross—"To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." How blessed, had he seen, through the Gospel vision, a great multitude which no man could number, with palms of victory in their hands, ushered into the possession and enjoyment of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away: "And it shall be said in that day, Lo! this is our God: this is the Lord; we will rejoice and be glad in his salvation." This is our privilege; let us improve it. Greatly are we now comforted, whether we consider our God, our own circumstance, the provision to expiate our guilt, to redeem us from the power of sin, to support us under the afflictions of life, and uplift us in triumph above the king of terrors. O let us, one and all, believe and embrace this Gospel. Let our faith work by love, purify the heart, and overcome the world, that we may

claim the God of Heaven for our God, his Son for our Redeemer, his Spirit for our sanctifier, his people for our people, his presence for our abiding-place, his joy for our portion for ever.



SERMON · II.

GENTILE WISDOM SEEKING THE CHILD JESUS.

“Behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him.”—Matt. ii. 1, 2.

WITH this interesting story we are all familiar. The Festival of the Epiphany is founded on the affecting event it records. It makes the Gospel appointed for that Festival. It occurs again in the second lesson for the Sunday after. And we may have perceived, also, that the Collect for this Festival, in its special reference, bears directly on this extraordinary incident of our Lord's life. We may hence infer the importance which the Church, in all ages, has attached to the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. If we turn to the Collect for the Epiphany, we shall see that God is there devoutly recognized by the Church, as the invisible agent in all that our narrative records. The manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles was within the divine purpose. He chose the time. He chose the men who were to constitute these first-fruits of the Gentile world—the element, as it were, of the Holy Church Universal. He chose “the leading of a star,” as His own appointed

instrumentality in bringing these men to Christ. A holy mystery, therefore, must necessarily hang over this narrative. Something is written, because it pertains to ourselves. Something is not written, because it pertains to God only. We might be gratified indeed to have learned more particularly what circumstances led to the calling and election of these Eastern Sages as the first-fruits of the Gentile world. But we have intimations on some interesting points relating to this very inquiry. The condition of these Gentile strangers, both as learned men and men of affluence, was in reverse of that general rule by which God, in the manifestation of His Son, was pleased to proceed. The Apostle gives the general rule in his Epistle to the Corinthians. "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are."* And the end of this economy is declared by the Apostle to be, "that no flesh should glory in his presence." As the divine power was to be made manifest in the introduction of the Gospel; so in the choice of instrumentalities for this purpose, all that the world admired or esteemed to be great, and influential and overbearing, was in a marked manner to be passed by—while that which on the world's principles was accounted weak, contemptible and least efficient, would, for this very reason, be

* 1 Cor. i. 26-29.

chosen of God as the instrument of his power. But men are prone either to overlook the divine intention altogether, or to pervert into a stumbling-block to faith what was intended as a help. Therefore, this general-rule of divine procedure was liable to be misunderstood. That which, in the success of the Gospel, was intended to humble the lofty looks of man, and to bow down his haughtiness, might be ascribed not to the divine power, but to the weakness of those who were affected by it. We see how the Jews fell, as by instinct, into this perversion of the divine purpose. "Have any of the rulers—ask they with seeming triumph—have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people, who know not the law, are cursed."* Thus, in the language of a distinguished author, the outward meanness of the Church, instead of confounding human pride, was made to tarnish the Redeemer's glory. The proud Jew ascribed the success of the Gospel to the ignorance and meanness of its trophies. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus doubtless served for a time to repel these wanton calumnies. The Jew, it seemed, had quite forgotten the wise and noble men who had come from afar; and in faith, to do homage to the Child Jesus. Were they too "cursed" because of their ignorance and obscurity Far from it.

The description afforded us of these wise men is indeed short, for obvious reasons; but from what is incidentally dropped by the Evangelist, we may reasonably infer that on all the points to which, on natural principles, men attach importance, these Eastern magi were distinguished. The sensation they created on

* John vii. 49.

their arrival at Jerusalem, is said to have reached the throne of Herod, and from thence to have spread throughout the whole city. This monarch, we are told, also had a private interview with these sages. They furnished the occasion, moreover, on which the grand council of the nation was convened, in order to determine a question concerning the birthplace of Messiah. They are termed, moreover, "*wise men*," or, as we should now express it, educated men; learned professors in astronomical or other science. In this construction of the terms, our critical writers generally agree. God was found of them while they sought Him not. They were exploring the heavens with the eye of science, when it pleased God to open to their discovery a miraculous meteor or a star hitherto unknown. This discovery was attended to their minds, in relation to the expected Messiah, with impressions of solemnity and awfulness which at once settled their faith. They had a testimony from God peculiar to themselves. The Messiah, we may remember, was prophetically set forth under the title of the "*Desire of all Nations*;"* and no historical truth is better attested than that, at this period, learned and reflecting men of all nations were not merely expectants of such an event, but deeply felt the necessity of divine interposition. That these men, moreover, were in affluent circumstances, and so far not open to the malicious imputations of the Jews, may be inferred from their offerings. These were princely in kind, and doubtless not less so in degree. From this general view of the character and circumstances of these strangers, founded on such intimations as we have, it may be concluded that they were men

* Hag. ii. 7.

of character both at home and abroad—men distinguished for their learning, in affluent circumstances, and, not improbably, from the estimation in which they were held at Jerusalem and the sensation they created there, men whose fame had previously transcended the limits of their own country.

One just inference, from the character and circumstances of these men, seems obvious enough. The Gospel is dependent for its trophies on no one particular condition of man's intellect or outward aspect of life. There is a dulness of ignorance, and there is a sordid apathy of want unfavorable to the reception of the Gospel; so also there is a pride of intellect, a pride of riches, a love of worldly fame, or a dread of worldly scorn, which is equally, if not more unfriendly. But the Gospel, in innumerable instances, has triumphed over each obstacle and of every kind. In one Scripture narrative, we contemplate the Lord's trophies in a body of shepherds, as they watched their flocks by night. In the narrative before us, we contemplate these trophies in a body of learned professors. The mean man is brought down under grace into the humility of faith; the mighty man also is humbled under grace into the same depth, and the eyes of the lofty are humbled. The Lord of Hosts only is exalted. And if we look into the faith of these distinguished strangers, learned and opulent as they were, we shall find it difficult to conceive, how it could have been exhibited in deeper loveliness, or in lovelier simplicity. In understanding, indeed, they were men; in opulence, they were princes; but in faith they seem to have been God's dear little children. God led them to their Redeemer by a star; and though on their arrival at Jerusalem, they were met by a series of difficulties, yet

in the humility of their faith, they overcame them all. Recount these difficulties. In the first place, it was natural with them to suppose, that the metropolis of Judea would have been honored as the birthplace of the King of the Jews, and that, on their arrival, they would find the royal city under all the excitement of the occasion, and ringing with joyous acclamations. They inquire immediately for his place: Where is He that is born King of the Jews? But, behold—so far from witnessing at Jerusalem the joyous sensation they had so reasonably anticipated, they were met by an unaccountable indifference and apathy. These men, in reality, had brought to Jerusalem the first intelligence of a new-born King. This intelligence through them soon reached Herod and raised his jealous apprehensions. He was troubled, it is said, and all Jerusalem with him. All this must have operated as a discouragement to their faith. Their guide-star, moreover, during their stay at Jerusalem had disappeared, and restless doubts must soon have arisen, whether all that had preceded might not have been delusive. This is a species of temptation common to Christian people in all the earlier stages of their faith. At first, the daystar shines within their own hearts; the testimony is clear; their impressions are lively and controlling; their faith flows like a river, deep and overpowering in its determinations. But, presently, the daystar within their hearts disappears; their force is abated. If they stand at all, they stand on conscience and a sense of duty; but perplexity often gets the mastery of their spirits; temptations succeed, and without divine mercy the man of faith, unawed by revelations of Almighty God, will be borne away and made like unto one that goeth down into the pit. We see something of this

doubt and perplexity in the history of John the Baptist. His daystar was eclipsed. He stood, indeed, and stood firm on conscience and duty; but he indites this extraordinary message to his Lord: "Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"* The temptations of the Evil One, it would seem, had disturbed the faith of that holy man, which they could not overbear. Hence that memorable monition of the Prophet, addressed to a mind perplexed under the fluctuations of its faith: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God."† Soon, however, the difficulties which beset the minds of these men on their arrival at Jerusalem are overcome. To their inexpressible joy, the star reappears. But mark where, in accordance with prophecy, it conducts them—to Bethlehem, an obscure village of the tribe of Judah, a community of poor people, a town of no worldly importance, unregistered in the annals of heroic fame—unknown, save in the designation of prophecy, as God's appointed place, out of which a Governor should arise, that should rule the Holy Church universal. Their guide-star hangs not merely over an obscure village, but as we may reasonably infer over an humble dwelling in that village. But with unfaltering faith do these men follow on to know the Lord. They enter in at the door; here, for the first time, they fix their eye on God manifest in the flesh—the Holy One of Israel—the new-born King. These trials of faith must in their case have derived additional force from national and educational feelings. As

* Mat. xi. 3.

† Is. l. 10.

Persian noblemen, their notions of princely state and of royal magnificence were extravagantly high. In no country than their own, as all travellers agree, is the pageant of royalty invested with more overpowering splendor. Yet, in faith, these men reverently and silently overcame all these adverse feelings and prejudices. They deported themselves as men, dealing with their Maker in a holy mystery of salvation. They were silent and adoring. They fell down and worshipped the Holy Child Jesus. Gratefully and in unison with their feelings presenting their princely offerings, and then departing for their own homes. We may here contemplate, then, in the excellent faith of these distinguished strangers, something of the power of Gospel grace, to penetrate through discouraging circumstances, and to sustain the soul under all her appointed discipline. Mark, too, the moral greatness of their faith. In the very presence of Herod, they inquire for another and a more rightful owner to the very throne on which he sat. They possess their faith in the midst of a reckless if not scoffing people. "We have seen His star in the East," say they, "and are come to worship Him." There is no victory of faith of more imperious necessity in the world than its victory over the fear of man. True faith, therefore, implies moral greatness. Men of the world may talk of this greatness, but they neither understand nor possess it. It belongs only to men whose faith has purified the heart and overcome the world. Such only are the Lord's freemen—the nobles of His kingdom. Theirs only is the loftiness of walk, the elevation of judgment and feeling which shine the brighter amidst the difficulties with which they may be surrounded. Oh let us individually aim for that faith which is of the operation

of God, which purifies the heart, and overcomes the world. We may perceive, too, in all their subsequent course, the humility of their faith. Humility is the parent of moral greatness. They were not offended at the lowly circumstances under which the new-born King was manifested to their sight. They gratefully received Him as it had pleased God to reveal Him in His humiliation. Their own expectations and feelings in the matter were given to the winds. We see men from a country of princely state and splendor, bow down within a cottage—in an obscure village—to do homage to the Lord's anointed, whom they had expected to find at the metropolis, amidst the acclamations of all Judea, admired within a palace, or worshipped on a throne. And what is faith without this humility, but a vain presumption? How shall its subject walk humbly with God? No: the wisdom of God will offend him. His own wilfulness in reality is the rule of his spirit and conduct. His own expectations, his own feelings and preoccupations are to be gratified. He is not unlike to Naaman, the Syrian, who, while avowedly consulting God, passes, nevertheless, on the divine counsels he has received, and impiously rejects them. How a man of this temper of mind is to love the Church as his appointed guide-star—how he is to rejoice with exceeding joy in such an instrumentality—how he is to hear the Church as he ought to hear, and to walk in her holy ways, and to cleave to her fellowship and communion, as the appointed guide of his youth—we have yet to learn. The probability is, a man of this wilfulness must soon break covenant with God, choose his own way to heaven, and in the distraction of his own peace learn what inspiration had taught—

that with the lowly only is wisdom.* The heart's desire and prayer of humble faith is, to be led by the Spirit through God's chosen instrumentalities. It feels its own blindness, distrusts its own preoccupations, leans not to its own understanding, is thankful to be led to the Friend and Redeemer of sinners, wherever his presence may be assured. An humble faith appreciates the divinely appointed instrumentalities for this purpose. It is a willing and an obedient faith, realizing itself to be nothing, and that God is all in all. Another point of instruction from this narrative, which must strike the attention, we may perceive in the decision of religious character which distinguished these illustrious foreigners. Every portion of their history, as far as intimated in our brief narrative, is marked with decision. They remind us of a merchantman abroad, transacting business in some great metropolis. His course is forward, irrespective of persons or things. He is a man among thousands—a man of single vision in prosecuting the desire of his heart. His very looks are dispatchful. He anticipates the close of his business, and his return to his own country. And of what indispensable moment to our spiritual welfare, and in a world like this, is not decision of religious character! Religion, let it be remembered, is matter of individual appropriation. Its subject is one man among a thousand, and a man of but one grand leading concern, to which all other concerns are subordinate. His heart is fixed, and this fixedness is depicted on his very aspect. He is bent on finishing his course with joy—he looks forward to the period of his return home, which is a heavenly home, and presently he is gone. We see

* Prov. xi. 2.

him no more. Yet we all know there is no evil more common than that implied in a loose, unguarded, negligent state of the religious affections. We seem to be men of leisure; the mind vacant; the heart disengaged; the eye excursive; the whole man unbent. How, in this temper of mind, or state of the heart, the wise men would ever have accomplished the object of their journey, we are at a loss to know. All the circumstances, we have seen, so far from tending to confirm their religious impressions, were calculated to weaken, if not to efface them. In every step of their progress, and as far as men and things around them were concerned, they seem to have met with but little encouragement. The very topic which interested their hearts, and had separated them from their homes, was, at Jerusalem, one of the most unpopular subjects of inquiry which, at that time, could possibly have been broached. The tyrant on the throne had sought to inveigle them into his own interest, and to make them accessory, however unconsciously to themselves, to his own nefarious ends. We can readily perceive how, with less fixedness of heart or decision of religious purpose, they might easily have yielded their faith to the existing state of things around them, and forfeited, in the issue, all the blessings which were in reserve for their persevering fidelity. O! let us individually cherish fixedness of heart with God. Let our religious character, in all places and at all times, be marked with a holy decision. "As for me and my house," said Joshua, "we will serve the Lord."* How painful the spectacle, so often presented, of professing Christians compromising the integrity of their holy faith—parting with their religion

* Josh. xxiv. 15.

by piecemeal, on worldly maxims of expediency, as this or the other emergency may seem to require!

Finally. The guide-star itself, by which these wise men were conducted to their Redeemer, however peculiar to themselves, is not without its invaluable suggestions. We may here learn, that divine guidance is adapted to the necessities of a meek and lowly mind. These rightly disposed men, in the search of the newborn King, needed a guide, and rather than suffer them to seek His face in vain, God ordained a star for this end. We, too, as individuals, in truly coming to Christ, need a guide, and for us individually has a guide been divinely instituted and ordained. We mean the Church of the living God, the pillar of fire, and ground of the truth. All things, indeed, are of God. None but God can lead a sinner to the Lord Jesus. "No man can come to me," said our Lord, "except the Father which hath sent Me draw him."* So no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.† But God interposes by chosen instruments, ordinary or extraordinary, as the case may require. The Church is a standing miracle, wrought for the spiritual guidance of the whole world, to the end of time. This is a great mystery which we dare not explore. But the general guidance implied in the Church, was never intended to supersede the operations of the Spirit on our individual minds in bringing us to Christ. The humble believer has an inward testimony peculiar to himself. "He that believeth on the Son of God," saith an Apostle, "hath the witness in himself."‡ The daystar shines within his own heart. He enjoys a peace, strengthening and elevating and comforting to his soul, which however re-

* John vi. 44.

† 1 Cor. xii. 3.

‡ 1 John v. 10.

garded by others, is to him a pledge and foretaste of eternal joy. But this inward testimony is held by a conditional tenure. Its radiance is impaired by the sin which dwelleth in us; and there are times of interior apostacy, when it wholly disappears. But though the inward testimony fail, the Church remains. When that which is peculiar to ourselves is eclipsed, the Church continues to show the way. We cleave to her through whatever phases our own spiritual frame is destined to pass. Her God is our God for ever and ever; and through her, He will be our guide even unto death.

One general remark, and we are done. The case of these wise men, if rightly viewed, will comfort our hearts and invigorate our faith under all the seeming or real difficulties which oppose our coming to Christ. We see in them, how God interposed and beat down all the obstacles in the way of realizing their heart's desire. This should encourage those who, with whatever good desires in their hearts, find themselves kept back from Christ through various causes. Some of these may be intellectual, others moral. Some of these may have been derived from adverse habits of thought or unreasonable prejudice; others may exist, as the corrupt and debasing fruits of sin. But such may here see, how God is able to beat all these things down, and to make the rough way of approach to Christ smooth before them, and even delightful to be trodden. Renew, then, your prayers to God for His merciful interposition in your behalf. Entreat Him as a Father to have compassion on one unworthy to be called His son. Cherish confiding hopes in God. Hear and reverence the Church as your guide-star; and, believe me, you too shall presently be found where the wise men were

found—at the feet of your Redeemer, in lively expression of the thankfulness, and admiration, and love, and joy, which God had put into your heart.



SERMON III.

Lent.

THE LENTEN SEASON—A CALL TO REPENTANCE.

“Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.”—Joel ii. 13.

AMIDST continued tokens of divine love, we have arrived at the beginning of that holy season which from time immemorial has been consecrated to more especial acts of religion. The Church in a marked degree responds, at this season, to the sentiment embraced in the text, and in her appointed service calls upon her members to turn unto the Lord their God in the reality of an humble and contrite spirit. As a motive to the right performance of this duty, she assures us in the same breath that the Lord our God is still gracious to his people and merciful—slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Such was the tenor of the message addressed to ancient Israel, of which our text is a part, and from its import we may learn one important end of a standing ministry; we mean, to recall the people of God to repentance, to summon them to their first works. “Rend your heart and not your

garments, and turn unto the Lord your God ; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." We shall consider the passage as pressing an important duty, with the right manner of its performance, and persuasive motives also to engage our obedience. First, the duty itself: "Turn unto the Lord your God." A back-turning on our Heavenly Parent is here presupposed. Thus the prophet Jeremiah: "For they have turned their back unto me, and not their face."* The world, it would seem, had first won their eye, then fascinated their imaginations, then corrupted their hearts, and finally had re-established its dominion over the whole man. Faith had become subordinate to sight, the spiritual man to the man earthly, the invisible realities of an eternal world to the passing shadows of time. How melancholy the spectacle in the eye of all spiritual intelligences! A mystery of infatuation under any circumstances, but more especially in the case of those before whose eyes a crucified Saviour has been sacramentally set forth. Shall we wonder if, under the prevalence of this back-turned position, and the heedless inattention to the soul, it indicates, that special messages should be indited by the Spirit, and special seasons appointed, and solemn assemblies called, and the most urgent motives to repentance and conversion multiplied, if happily our revolting spirits may thereby be reclaimed? Whatever posture in relation to God they may occupy who know him not, our faces, beloved friends, need be Zionward. What people, in point of privilege, are more exalted than ourselves? On what people has the glory of the Lord more illus-

* Jer. ii. 27.

triously arisen? If we turn not unto the Lord our God, who shall turn? If we arise not and shine, who shall respond to the light and goodness which mark our path?

Again: The injunction presupposes not merely a state of heedless inattention, but one of criminal negligence. Consider the peculiar care which God has bestowed on his people. In the beautiful allegory of the prophet Isaiah this divine solicitude in our behalf is illustrated under the imagery of a vineyard. This was hedged about—freed from every nursery of thorns and briars—planted with the choicest vine, and enriched with every incentive to fruitfulness and verdure. Such, in an eminent degree, is the care which, in the parental affection of the Lord our God, has been expended in our case. Not only have we been redeemed from sin and eternal death through the precious blood of Christ, but quickened by the Spirit, admitted into the family of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the enjoyment of all its peculiar privileges. The divine care and assiduities in behalf of this family make the subject of an affecting appeal to all moral intelligences. “What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?”* And is there no criminality in the negligence of a back-turned position, which necessarily frustrates every reasonable expectation of Heaven, and baffles all the care which a gracious Parent has so condescendingly bestowed? Is there no criminality in perpetuating, from month to month and from year to year, either in relation to God or to our brethren, such torpor of affection, if not indeed the most repelling indifference? How contrary to this bad spiritual state

* Is. v. 4.

were the habits and dispositions of holy men of old? They could not fold their hands nor sit down contented unless the candle of the Lord shone upon their heads, and the secret of God abode upon their tabernacle. "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently," said David,* "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes." "O that I were as in months past," exclaimed Job, as contrition rended his heart, "as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shone upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness: as I was, in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle; when the Almighty was yet with me; when my children were about me; when I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil."† "Where is then the blessedness ye spake of?"‡ asks an apostle of a people who had once received him as an angel of God. No; this apostate position we speak of, with its heedless inattention—its criminal negligence, is indeed within the liabilities of all; but the true servant of the Redeemer cannot rest there: he feels and knows that its spiritual indifference, its apathies, its formalities, its disaffection to the brethren, grieves the Father of his spirit, grieves the Redeemer, grieves the abiding Spirit, and frustrates every gracious purpose of Heaven. "They have turned unto me the back and not the face," saith the Lord God, "though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction."§ Beloved friends, we, as parents, know the nature of parental susceptibilities. We may know, under the corroding experience of filial ingratitude, something of that

* Ps. cxix. 4. † Job xxix. 2. ‡ Gal. iv. 15. § Jer. xxxii. 33.

mingled emotion which combines within itself the bitter ingredients of sorrow, grief, displeasure. And yet, what are *our* parental claims, as fathers of the flesh, compared with those of the Father of our spirits? What have we done to warrant just expectations in respect to our children in comparison with what God has done. What manifestations of kind and affectionate wisdom, of patience, of forbearance, of untiring assiduity have we afforded, which in weight, and measure, and continuance, will compare with those of which we ourselves have been the favored subjects? O how full, how far surpassing enumeration, have not been the displays toward us of divine parental love! "If I should speak of them," says David, "they are more than I am able to express."* Are young persons included within the scope of our message? Unquestionably. Consider then, my young friends, the very peculiar manifestations of divine love you so richly enjoy. Mark the favorable circumstances under which you have come into existence—the surprising accommodation of saving truth to your opening powers—the general interest within the Church awakened in your behalf—your early adoption into the family of your Redeemer—the perfect standard of moral sentiment and of correct feeling under which you increase in stature. From whence are these indisputable advantages you enjoy, but from above? Look abroad into dreary sections of the earth, and see, in the contrast, how, under high reasons unknown to ourselves, you have been chosen of God, and, in privilege, exalted unto heaven. And shall you perpetuate a false position in relation to your Divine Friend and Benefactor, though he has

* Ps. xl. 5.

taught you, rising up early and teaching you? Forbid it gratitude! forbid it every noble and generous sentiment of youth! Yes, you will hearken unto the message which the Spirit indites; you will turn unto the Lord your God; you will sing unto the Lord a new song; your grateful heart will sympathize with David when he sang, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?"* Are persons older in years summoned also by the voice of God to the rending of their impenitent hearts? Unquestionably. Let memory then recall, at this holy season, "all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness;" mark the stretching forth of parental hands—the exhibitions of parental forbearance of which you yourself have been the subject. Where is that host which came with you into life and were associated with you in the circle of early companionship? Ah! how many with claims on life not less urgent than your own, have been severed from the sun, and moon, and stars, and now moulder in untimely graves! How many who survive have survived the enjoyment of those signal blessings which you are permitted to retain. How many have been early seduced into forbidden paths, and now, if seen at all, are described in hopeless depths of irreligion and ruin. And who, may we not ask, hath made thee to differ? Why has some invisible power interposed in your behalf? Why, in your case, has the divine patience lengthened its cords, and the divine forbearance strengthened its stakes? Can it be that you should keep your backs turned upon the Lord your God? Surely not. Your experience of the world; your observation of what has

* Ps. cxvi. 12.

passed around you, not to mention the voice of Scripture, the impulse of heart and conscience, all forbid so shocking inconsideration, so sinful irreverence. You have seen the wicked driven away in his wickedness, and the righteous with hope in his death. Your understanding, your conscience, your heart is enriched with the practical illustrations afforded you of folly on the one hand and of wisdom on the other. What then, beloved friend, can you urge in extenuation of the worldliness of spirit implied in the position presupposed in the text. The youthful mind, fascinated by the splendor which the world emits, buoyant with hope, heedless of Scripture, and untaught by experience, may become the dupe of its own inherent blindness and want of thought. We can readily conceive how some may be entrapped by ignorance and some by delay; but how shall we reconcile advanced stages in life with a back-turned position on the Lord our God? O! let the message be regarded; let the message be timely obeyed; "turn unto the Lord your God."

We proceed to notice, secondly, the manner in which this duty is to be performed. "Rend your hearts and not your garments." In ancient usage, to rend the garment was an expressive act, and denoted the prevalence within of some powerful and deep-felt emotion. Grief, abhorrence, humiliation, were thus expressed. In this sense it denoted deep penitential affection, and the fault of Israel, implied in the message, was not in affording this outward expression of repentance, but in substituting it for that true repentance which the Lord their God required. They are instructed therefore in the text, as we should now say, not to content themselves with the mere external show or visible form of repentance, but in dependence on

God, to aim for a deep and radical work. And as this is the right manner of turning unto the Lord our God, so it is still incumbent on all who would truly repent and be converted. The very intent of this holy season would seem to be, that we may individually and under the Holy Spirit secure to ourselves a livelier and deeper religious affection, through all those means which best indicate the honesty and sincerity of our purpose.

In conclusion, let us notice the persuasive motives employed to engage our obedience. "For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." What an array of parental attributes is here presented to our minds! What motives to obedience can be conceived of more inspiring to our moral nature, or better calculated to effect the gracious intent of the message? Mark them separately. The Lord our God, in relation to whom we have indulged so much irreverence, is "gracious." He deals not with us according to our sins, neither does he reward us according to our iniquities. He is "merciful." Though justly displeased with the back-turning of his people, he is not inexorable. He may now be entreated by us, and especially during this holy season. He is "slow to anger." Is not hasty to forsake his people in their back-turnings, nor to cut them off in his displeasure, but rebukes and chastens them, and patiently awaits the rise and progress of a better temper and disposition of mind. "He is of great kindness." Sees his penitent people while yet a great way off; anticipates their return; relieves them, by his grace, of overpowering embarrassment; giveth unto them liberally, and upbraideth not.* Mark, finally,

* James i. 5.

“He repenteth him of the evil.” Averts temporal evils where the infliction is not indispensably required, or, when permitted to overtake us, overrules them to wise and gracious purposes.

And now let us say, is there not in these divine parental attributes a moral appeal of resistless power in its application to a rational and reflective mind? What honest and good heart, under the ordinary grace of the Holy Spirit, will not rend under habitual and devout contemplation of the divine character as here portrayed? Surely this is life eternal to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. How significant is that declaration of David: “For there is mercy with thee, therefore shalt thou be feared.”* As though he had said, I might have impiously braved thy terrors; but thy goodness, O my God, disarms me; it rends my rebellious heart, and turns my face to thee in undissembled penitential affection. Then, during this holy season, let us aim devoutly and assiduously to season our hearts with sacred impressions of the divine character. Under these impressions we cannot consent to remain with backs turned upon our God. We shall turn unto him with rended hearts; we shall face the radiance of his all-subduing goodness; we shall realize the inspiration of David when he exclaimed, “How amiable are thy dwellings, thou Lord of Hosts! My soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God. O Lord God of hosts, blessed is the man that putteth his trust in thee.”†

* Ps. cxxx. 4.

† Ps. lxxxiv. 1.

SERMON IV.

Lent.

THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST NOT SELF-CHOSEN.

“ Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.”—St. Matt. iv. 1.

THUS begins the narrative of our Lord's appointed season of fasting and temptation, and thus opens the Gospel for the day. Behold a fasting Saviour tempted of the devil! And it may be we need also the grace of abstinence. It is possible we may become thereby more easily led by the Spirit—may take a more decided character—as the obedient children of our Heavenly Father. It were strange, indeed, if our Lord fasted a season, that we should live regardless of the ascendancy which the flesh may have acquired over us; if he lay prostrate in devotional agony, that we should live cold and heartless in prayer; if he agonized in conflict with Satan, that we should live thoughtless and unsuspecting of spiritual enemies. We need be admonished from our narrative; we need hear the Church as she proclaims to-day her lesson; we need possess, as our own, the grace of abstinence; we need evidence, clear and incontrovertible as is a voice from heaven, that our flesh is subdued to the spirit, and no evidence can be more satisfactory than the one suggested in the Collect for the day—we mean obedience, a prompt, whole-hearted obedience to the godly motions of the Redeemer.

We purpose, however, to glance at the twofold

nature of our Lord's temptation; then consider a point of this temptation which falls more particularly within our own lines; and lastly, the succor on which we are privileged to rely. The temptation endured by our Lord, not less than his extraordinary fasting, is referred to in our Litany, as integral parts of the scheme of humiliation by which our Lord was to accomplish our redemption. "By thy baptism, fasting, and temptation, Good Lord deliver us." So also in the Collect for the day. "O Lord, who for our sake didst fast forty days and forty nights." The temptation is exhibited to our view, first, as a series of imposing but wicked suggestions thrown out by the Evil One, and which for the space of forty days annoyed the mind of our Lord; and, secondly, as a course of outward trials under which the counsels of Satan were defeated and himself repelled.

Now, that our minds are accessible to suggestions from the Wicked One, and that we are within the range of exposure to his diabolic assaults, none will be disposed to deny. These are common, at times, to all men, but more particularly to those of riper experience in spiritual conflicts and troubles. It would seem there are men too far reduced under the control of mere subalterns to occasion much alarm or uneasiness on the part of the chief himself. The world is a trusty agent. So is the flesh. In either instance the poor victim needs no direct interference of the devil. He is dreaming in a palace while locked up in a dungeon and in chains. It were needless to draw into closer tie the chain which binds this man to himself. As far as Satan is directly concerned, it may with truth be said, these blinded victims come in no misfortune like other folk, neither are they plagued like other men. But

little, often, do they suppose that an exemption from those spiritual troubles by which our Lord was humiliated and oppressed, and which have fallen within the lot of the best of men, will nevertheless consist with the most deplorable depths of selfishness and degradation. They lose sight of what they are, in the blinded conceit of what they are not. "And this is the cause," says David, "that they are so holden with pride and overwhelmed with cruelty. Their eyes swell with fatness, and they do even what they lust."* But let us walk circumspectly. The less we are annoyed with the powers of darkness, the more vigilant need we become against the ascendancy of the flesh and the mystic influence of the world around us. On the other hand, we need not think it strange, concerning evil suggestions infused within the mind, often of a degree of wickedness at which the soul shudders. We need not be afraid under these incursions of Satan. We need not distrust either God or our relation to God, nor yet his grace and mercy towards us. The servant is not greater than his Lord. What was a necessary part of his humiliation may be a necessary part of what the apostle means when he speaks of Christians "being made conformable to Christ's death."† All that is requisite would seem to be, that these assaults of Satan should be understood by us as something permitted of God to excite our vigilance and activity, and to which we become the more exposed as our souls draw nearer to that mind which was in Christ Jesus. Unquestionably our danger is thus increased, and for that very reason our Christian vigilance and care must be proportioned to the knowledge of our Christian liability;

* Ps. lxxiii. 6, 7.

† Phil. iii. 10.

for, though "greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world," and though God will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear, yet some exertion of our own will, in evidence at least of our own sincerity, is made of indispensable moment to our success. "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour."* But there is one point connected with our Lord's temptation which needs to be particularly regarded by us, as of standing monition. All the Evangelists who narrate the facts agree in this: that our Lord, in the religious retirement he had now sought, and which preceded the temptation, was "led by the Spirit." St. Mark raises the idea when he says, "And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness." Now, by these terms, whether the idea they convey be considered as more or less impelling on the mind, one thing is clear—that our Lord did not negligently or voluntarily expose himself to these temptations of the devil. There was, in his case, nothing of that presuming confidence or adventurous feeling which disfigures the conduct of so many young professing Christians of the present day, and under which they have so often fallen into secret temptation and a snare. He was "led" or "driven" by the Spirit. His state of mind at this period may be inferred from what is narrated by the Evangelists. A voice from Heaven had just attested his character and mediatorship. St. Matthew has it, "This is my beloved Son," as though the multitude were addressed. St. Mark records, "Thou art my beloved Son," as though our Lord himself were addressed: taken toge-

* 1 Pet. v. 8.

ther, the affirmation was made equally to others and to our Lord himself. It is asserted, moreover, that at this time, he being full of the Holy Ghost, most abundantly endued from on high, "was led by the Spirit into the wilderness." Here, then, are the grounds of a state of mind which all must approve. Publicly and audibly accredited of Heaven, and fully endowed by the Holy Ghost, our Lord, so far from manifesting any thing of spiritual inflation or of undue confidence, was impelled by his sacred feelings to withdraw from the notice of men into a place of retirement, and for a season to engage in extraordinary private devotion. Here, at this holy season of fasting and prayer, in memorial of which the early Church consecrated her Lenten Fast, was our Lord assailed by his adversary the devil. "When I would do good," says an Apostle, "evil is present with me."* This is the Christian's doom all the way through life. Something unbidden present at the most hallowed season. Still, we say, to be moved by an impelling sense of duty is one thing; to surrender one's self to spiritual conceit, presuming confidence, or vain display, is another: under either we may fall into temptation. We may be assailed by the power of darkness, but the circumstances are infinitely apart. In the one instance, because submissive to God in the enlightened path of duty, we may implicitly trust God, fear no evil, rely confidently either on the divine protection against evil or on the divine overrule of evil which may be permitted to befall us there; but, in the other, we have no such security against an insidious foe, no such groundwork of consolation and support. We have chosen, most unjustifiably, to indulge

* Rom. vii. 21.

the vacancy of a careless mind, needlessly to incur hazardous exposures. Our young people, especially, should notice this particular mark in our Lord's temptation. Let it never be overlooked or forgotten, that in the temptation he encountered, he was "led up of the Spirit," was overtaken in the pathway of exemplary piety. This may teach us, that where God permits us to be overtaken by temptation while engaged in some approvable course, and under counsel, he may have some wise end to be served thereby. Certain it is that the temptation of our Lord was, in respect of his Heavenly Father, a measure of counsel and design; it was a measure of overrule in the Covenant of Grace, as necessary in its place and order to the work of redemption, as was any other feature of that wonderful achievement. The words of the Evangelist on this point are remarkably definite and clear. "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil." We may contemplate our Lord under various other aspects of his appointed suffering. The heart involuntarily saddens as the Church, in her round of service, guides along our devotion. We ponder on the humble character chosen by the Lord of Glory, on his obscure station, on his submission to the most injurious imputations, to the coarse jests, the obscene ribaldry, the vulgar habits of publicans and sinners. We see him arraigned as a criminal before corrupt tribunals, bearing his own cross, and finally writhing unto death under its excruciation; but here is an aspect of his humiliation which, in diabolical malice and cunning, transcends them all. Mark the descriptive terms of the Evangelists, how simple and affecting, and yet how inscrutable their meaning to our conceptions: "To be tempted of the devil." So also St.

Mark: "And he was there forty days tempted of Satan." So also St. Luke: "Being forty days tempted of the devil." But if, in this humiliating endurance by our Lord for the space of the early Lent, we have discovered the gracious purpose of the Holy One in submitting man's Redeemer to all the points of man's temptation, to the end that, having been tempted himself, he might be able to succor them that are also tempted; then, may we not ask, why ever intimidated under the mysterious depressions or strange incidents which come upon us? Why, on any new and unexpected amazement, of so little faith? Why ever distrustful under any inscrutable permission of Providence or Grace? Behold the great temptation, unexpectedly indeed, but meekly met by our Lord; met under the leadings of the Divine Spirit; met in the pathway of duty; met at a juncture when seemingly most to be deprecated by himself, and which changed a period of anticipated calmness and devotion into a term of the sharpest conflict and endurance. Let us meditate on these things and take more lively impression of the truth, that not a hair of our head is left to chance or fate; that not the most insignificant existence is too inconsiderable to be under a special supervision; that not one falleth to the ground without our Father.

We, indeed, are born unto trouble. This we shall find, whether we be led up of the Spirit, or whether we be drawn away from the race set before us and enticed into paths of our own. But under the leadings of the Spirit, and through the guidance of the Church, our steadfast hearts need fear no ill. In due time there is a rest for the people of God from evils which now threaten their peace. Even now innumerable evils are averted from our endurance. We know not from

what sufferings of magnitude we have been rescued. We have no record of the overrule of other evils in our case, and which have been made productive of good. So it is, much every way has, under grace, contributed to quicken our slow hearts with livelier faith in the divine protection and care.

To conclude, no doubt can be fairly entertained that, independently of any bearing on his own mediatorial character, many subordinate ends in relation to ourselves were comprehended within the ever-memorable temptation of our Lord. It can scarcely have escaped our attention, how frequently, and in what variety of form we are admonished by the inspired writers against the seductive influence of sense, and especially of the enchantment on the imagination, which attends the notion of worldly elevation and grandeur, of pleasure, of station, and influence. "All these," says the tempter to our Lord, "will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." And alas! how many in all ages, unprofited by the Gospel for the day, have not yielded to the base lure! Into what forgetfulness of God have not men been seduced! How common the spectacle of men destined for eternity whose imaginations have been seized upon by some power of the Evil One, and held in vile durance! They slumber on, as through the time past of life—they sleep. They rise early under their peculiar incentives; they eat the bread of carefulness; they whet their intellects and kindle their genius into flame; they burn incense to the world around, and the world inhales the fragrance and rewards their impiety; but they are held by a chain—spell-bound by horrible incantations which they cannot dissolve. They excite on the part of their adversary, the devil, no agitation, no alarm as to the final result.

They live seemingly of no sufficient importance in the scale of being to be devoured by himself. They, indeed, have their difficulties and their trials, but they arrive at these through their own understandings, and inherit their misery, as the sad fruit of dereliction from God. Oh! let such persons be admonished by the oft-recurring issues of their own way. Trouble, indeed, is our wise allotment here; but let it be met in the spirit of submission to God, in the pathways of duty and of peace: then shall our solitary places blossom with prayer, and the wilderness rejoice with the angels' songs. Our blessed Lord's victory under temptation is but the pledge of theirs who rely upon him; for in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them also which are tempted. Soon the Lenten fast will yield to the Heavenly feast. The period allotted to temptation will have closed for ever. But, if faithful unto the end, higher ministrations of joy than the angels' will be ours. The triumph of the moment will be the triumph of eternity. We shall be for ever with the Lord.



SERMON V.

Lent.

FAITH EFFECTUAL ONLY BY CHRIST'S WORD.

"O! woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee, even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."—St. Matt. xv. 28.

THE narrative of which our text is the conclusion, we have perceived, makes the Gospel for the day. The

incident narrated teaches us what manner of faith our necessities require; how humble it should be, how constant, how confiding, how enduring—and in due time, how successful it will be in securing to us, through divine mercy, the help our spiritual welfare so much needs. The instruction to needy souls in the way of life, thus given, is full and satisfactory. Our faith may as yet be deficient in humility, in constancy, in confidence, in affection. Sin may yet successfully assail us through the body, or through evil suggestions and thoughts, and gain the dominion over us. It may be the very trials of our faith, and by which alone we can be certified of its excellent character or seasonably warned of its defects, have served only to retard or intimidate our advance in the way of life. Many have unwisely fled from the field, where all mistakes admitted of cure, and where an everlasting crown is promised to all who continue faithful unto the end. We need to be led up into spiritual conflicts—to be instructed in the arts of Holy War. If saved at all, we are to be saved, not by the operation of any natural principle, persuasion or law—but by faith. It is through the humility of this faith, that divine power is free to uphold us. It is through the constancy of this faith, that divine power furthers our deliverance with continual help. It is through the perseverance of this faith, that the crown of life is given us. These great things are done for us, contrary often to our natural views and feelings; and even contrary often to the natural principles, which, in other relations, we have been taught to revere.

Now as we are assaulted by our enemies often through the members of the body, and often through the thoughtful powers of the soul—so we ought to

give the more heed to the Scripture lesson which the Church to-day holds up. One of the saddest spectacles of delusion is that of a man who, alive to the necessities of his state, sets out to be saved on false and dangerous principles—who has no lively, effective sense of his dependence on divine power, nor of the necessity of his being kept either outwardly as to the body, or inwardly as to the soul—who has but little reliance on invisible defence, and habitually asks for none. We can have no other enlightened expectation of this man, than whatever be his present zeal and devotion of mind, he must ere long be wearied out in the greatness of his way, overcome by his adversities, wrecked in the constancy of his faith. He has become the victim of so many disappointments, of such subversion of natural hopes, so many homely truths and so much unsparing mortification have expended their force upon him, that his untutored frame is tempted either to relinquish the field, or at least to follow the concerns of the soul afar off, as one whose vigor was gone, but who dare not stop. The Christian world abounds with such persons, men of discouraged hearts, who do not understand the way of life; who have notions of their own under which they have become dispirited; who, many of them it is to be feared, are scarcely susceptible of being renewed again unto repentance. The Church now takes it for granted that her children, assailed perhaps through the body, as in every instance of concupiscence, solitary vice, insobriety, excess, sloth, extravagance, or through the thoughtful faculties of the soul; as in every instance of absorption in the business, cares, inordinate affections, and pleasures of this life: we say the Church at this period, with reason, assumes the state of her members

to be that of awakened persons stirred up, truly desirous of present deliverance from all evil, and of future protection from its power. No instruction can be of greater importance to the right keeping of Lent, than is here conveyed in our narrative. To be saved from the vexatious assaults of the devil, we may perceive, is not the work of a moment, nor the result of a few sighs, and sobs, and prayers. The conflicts of true faith are often protracted and severe. It is our own nature which makes them so. In every instance, natural mistakes are slow to be corrected. Much, moreover, is to be unlearned before the mind is at all in a condition to be replenished with grace. We cherish imaginations and conceits which need to be pulled down, ere wiser and safer occupancies of thought can be built up. There is required here, as elsewhere, an extirpation of natural growth, a breaking up of fallow ground, before rational hopes of an abundant harvest can be entertained. Besides, a saving faith in its application to our nature is not only of slow operation, but without it we can do nothing profitably. It is what the Apostle terms, "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus."* This law requires our obedience, as the condition of our salvation. We must believe, in order to be saved. Its inspiration on the moral being is what we term humility, for it prostrates our lofty nature to the ground. Through this, we become reconciled to the discipline of being pulled down in all proud assumption, thrown back, as was the woman in our narrative; broken up as she was, mortified as she was, and even debased in self-estimation. Under all this discipline implied—through which, under the Spirit, we become

* Rom. viii. 2.

less than nothing and vanity in our own sight—true faith holds fast its confidence in God, as the refuge of a naked soul, which confidence, as our narrative shows, hath in due time great recompense of reward.

Let us now look into the narrative itself. A Syrophenician woman appeals to our Lord in behalf of her afflicted daughter. Her petition is apparently not heeded. As a Gentile, she was out of place. The children came first. She had anticipated the ministrations of the Gospel, but her time had not yet come. Unanswered, she becomes importunate. This shows, indeed, that her heart was interested in her prayers; but does not essentially help the difficulty. Her importunity, however, elicits the disclosure of a graver truth. His personal ministry was assigned only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. We may observe how the interest of the heart in a matter, serves often but to disclose obstacles in the way of attaining it. As her prayer passed into importunity, so she became still more perplexed. But in the humility of her faith was the secret of her constancy. She had learned to leave in the bosom of God what she herself could not solve. We need all learn this as we hope for salvation. The practical importance of the lesson is beyond all others. We must learn to cast a corroding care upon the shoulders of One who is able to bear it, and willing to receive it. The use of all difficulties in the way of life, is to incite our trust in God, without which we are nothing. The darkness to us is no darkness to Him. The night to us is to Himself as clear as the day. At this point of her trial, it is said, the woman "worshipped Him." St. Mark has it, "She fell at His feet." In either case her object was to press a petition, which she felt He only was competent to

grant. Here a new kind of discouragement was started by our Lord. As the grant of mercy to a Gentile was beyond the province of His personal ministry; so it was also opposed by the reason of the thing. It was not meet that any ministrations, which were appropriate only to the children of God, should be improvidently squandered on heathens. It was not unlike to wasting the children's bread on voracious animals, which had no appreciation of its value. Now this is a homely truth, and in innumerable instances of its just application, it would but irritate the scorn of our lofty nature. What, we should say, is thy servant a dog? It would be not unlike to the humiliating message of the Prophet, which festered for the present the heart of the proud Syrian, although it ultimately ministered to his cure. The humility of this woman's faith, however, was equal to the requisition upon it. She admits the premises, but humbly qualifies the conclusion. The children's bread, though not intended for mean and voracious animals—yet incidentally at times falls within their allotment. The dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the children's table. Might not some fragmentary portion of mercy become her own? If so, she could most wishfully and gratefully receive it. Now what was early affirmed of Jacob, was verified also in the case of this Phenician woman. As a prince in faith, he had power with God; and as a princess in faith, she prevailed also. Indeed, the humility of faith is its greatness, and is in itself a power with God. Its arguments at His throne are invincible. High heaven surrenders its prerogatives to this prevailing virtue. It overcomes, we see, all legal difficulties; transcends all limits—takes the kingdom of God by a holy violence, and receives from God himself peculiar commen-

dations and rewards. "Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

Two fair inferences will afford us matter for further improvement. In the first place, we may here learn how to estimate aright the difficulties and perplexities, which, to beings like ourselves, necessarily beset the pathway of life. Now there is a form of religion, current in the world, which is marked neither by difficulties nor discouragements. Its subject has heard of such things in the history of others, but has lived a stranger to them himself. May we not ask, why is this man at all a member of the Church? May it not be, because on growing up, he found himself to be there? He has taken the Church, as he has taken his mother tongue. It is possible, he may be educationally conformed to all its external decencies and proprieties. He had found it in vogue, and had cheerfully acquiesced with his friends, in its character and claims upon him. John's baptism also, we read, was at one period in fashion. Its fame had extended through all Judea, and in all the region round about Jordan. The people fell into its ranks almost sympathetically, as they now often fall in, and with many knowing Scribes and Pharisees, who had ends to be served, were borne along on a popular current, pleasantly to themselves, on the reputed way to heaven, taking with them a generous baggage of what the heart most loved, and leaving behind about as much as had not deeply interested their affections. To talk to this class of persons of difficulties in religion, such as the deepest humility of faith only can surmount; to talk to them of occasions of discouragement of an earnestness of prayer which the interest of the

heart inspires, and of a constancy which will not be overcome, is to speak to them on a topic beyond the sphere of their comprehension, in an unknown tongue. Their view of religion consists well enough with an unbroken heart and mind. Its cross is but an ornament worn upon their bosoms, not ingrained into their moral nature. Now, it is not our purpose to decry even this childish aspect of religion. It has its page in the history of many men, and doubtless in a thousand instances has, under God, passed on into the conversion of the soul. The evil most to be lamented is, that so many should live contentedly in this childish state, with no aspirations or desires of spiritual enlargement. They live in ignorance of spiritual manhood—have no experience of its peculiar conflicts, its throwbacks, its endurances—a state of life which, through the lively perception and feeling of its necessities, must for ever bind the soul to the Redeemer as it is now sustained of God only through the humility of faith. It is here as in the ordinary circumstances of life. When a man finds himself to be gliding onwards smoothly, vexed by no harassments, encountering no rebuffs, familiar only with the names of things, with but little acquaintance in their stern realities; why he has ample reason to distrust the fact of having yet fully embarked upon the deep and broad ocean of life. He is not unlike to some noble ship, towed down some smooth and majestic river, but not yet launched forth on the rolling sea to breast the stormy wave. Now manhood implies the lively sense of responsibility. It is familiar with obstructions which awaken the mind to thought—with collisions which sharpen forecast and call out latent energies—with disappointments which, though they blast the visions of hope, heal many a distemper

—with delays which, though they weary patience, teach men to wait upon God—with throw-backs which chasten presumption and moderate the fervors of ambition. Familiarity with these things, we say, indicates manhood—the state which has fairly launched forth on life and now breasts its adversities and troubles. The period is no longer a halcyon day with us, but of sturdy, and not unfrequently, of painful effort.

Well, our narrative shows that it is just so in spiritual matters. There is a period of childishness in religion—a halcyon day of dreams, and there is a radical conversion of the soul, a manhood of the Gospel, sufficiently attested to every man by the sense of responsibility which has been awakened within him by the succession of difficulties, vexations and discouragements, which have schooled down his moral frame into the lowliness and humility of true faith. The religion of the man has changed, for this simple reason, that he himself, under God, has changed. His whole heart is now in it; he is serious and in earnest. He has dropped the names of things, and taken to the things themselves. He has dropped books and sentiments, and taken to the stern realities of truth. “He has put away childish things,” for the simple reason, that he himself has become a man. His way is no longer the stream down which young idlers are borne along smoothly and pleasantly to themselves; but rather as the rough waters which rocked his Redeemer ere they were stilled by omnipotent words. The Apostle has a fine passage of large application: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken: cast down, but not destroy-

ed.”* Now, to the growing Christian these changes in the aspects of religion are continually going on, because he himself is changing. There is not a point at which he is privileged to sit down and to sing a requiem to his soul. The change is not in religion, but in ourselves. It is consequent on the maturing of our own minds. As we approach the real object we see it in stronger points of view. Our spiritual discernment is less obstructed, more definite and clear. The change, we say, is in ourselves; just as by our advance in science, the physical world around us comes to be very differently regarded. Now such is our wonderful nature, that an unmortified, unsubdued spirit darkens the eye within, and distempers the judgment. But, as under the operations of grace our hearts become softer, more broken, contrite and believing—so our faith becomes more humble, more constant, more confiding, more enduring. We hold up better, we hold on better. We have learned that to be “cast down,” is not to be “destroyed.” If by nature the weakness is our own which bears us down; so by grace is the “excellency of the power” which bears us up. We see this excellency of power in the poor woman of our narrative. We see how in lowly faith and constancy she held up under her trial, and held fast till the time to favor her had come. Be assured, it must be so with ourselves in an infinitely higher concern. We must culture humility of faith, we must culture the constancy of faith. We fear, in both respects, we are sadly deficient. But let us bear in mind this most certain truth; that ungodly loftiness of the moral frame ever keeps pace with this deficiency. We are

* 2 Cor. iv. 7.

not in a state fit to receive good things from God. We are as yet too heady, too high-minded, and consequently too blinded in our hearts. We cannot endure chastisement. We are too easily hindered. We cannot bear the yoke. We are yet children; taken with childish things; easily dispirited; easily turned out of the way; often "tossed to and fro." "O that my people would have hearkened unto me; for if Israel had walked in my ways;—I should soon have put down their enemies. The haters of the Lord should have been found liars; but their time should have endured for ever."*

Hence, another obvious inference from our narrative, shows the secret use of all difficulties in religion. They test the stage of our growth. They try, with all needful accuracy, who we are, and from whence we came; whether we have the Spirit, or some spurious affection only. If we be easily offended because of the Word—if, but for a smooth time we believe; while in time of temptation, we fall away—let us be assured the stage we occupy is not the sphere of promised rest. How are we here to be kept both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls? How are we to be defended from all adversities which may happen to the one, or from evil thoughts which may assail the other? Surely, we must all perceive, how with less than an approved humility of faith, the Syrophenician had never attained her heart's desire. She, with the undisciplined Naaman, would have turned away in a rage, unmindful of the fact, that the reduction of the lofty heart is the first victory of faith, and essential to the achievement of every other. "Wait on the

* Ps. lxxxii. 13.

Lord," says David, "be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart."* It is discoverable from the word of God, and doubtless has fallen within general experience, that our difficulties and not our facilities, our sorrows and not our joys, our adversities and troubles, not our smoother walks in life, are chosen by the Spirit to be the instruments of His renewing grace. "O woman—tried, earnest, believing, meek-hearted woman—great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Precious is the example of humility and constancy illustrated by this lowly stranger, and which the Church holds up to-day for our imitation. She came to his feet, and worshipped her Saviour. There she waited upon God—as we are now taught in all our troubles to wait upon Him—until in due time her request was granted. She returned to her house to mingle the best sympathies and joys of a mother with those of her daughter, once grievously vexed with a devil; now herself again, quiet and serene. Let her approved spirit be ours, in the higher concerns of the soul. We are continually vexed with the fiery assaults of the same implacable enemy. We need to be kept in body and soul. We need to be defended from all hurtful adversities. We have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; our sufficiency is of God. We need this woman's faith, humility, constancy, devotion; but especially, her invincible confidence in the grace and mercy of the Redeemer. Let us learn from her example, how to wait upon God—and especially at this holy season, that with her we may receive an everlasting consolation.

* 1 Ps. xxvii. 14.

SERMON VI.

Lent.

THE TEACHING OF THE MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES.

“For they considered not the miracle of the loaves.”—St. Mark, vi. 52.

BREAD is the symbol of Gospel grace. The breaking and distribution of the one is the sign of ministration of the other. The comfort to the soul, following therefrom, is the topic which now interests the mind of the Church, and is held up by her to our devout contemplation as the lesson for the day: hence the fourth Sunday in Lent was early distinguished as “the Sunday of Refection:” it was termed also “Mid Lent;” and sometimes the “Midway Feast.” It was on this day that the devout keepers of the Lent season, long since mouldered into dust, thanked God for the success hitherto afforded them, and took courage to follow on. It was truly to them the Mid Lent season. From this day they set out afresh in holy Lent keeping, with invigorated spirits, to secure to themselves the full benefits of the holy season now half expended. By “the comfort of grace,” in the Collect we may understand, therefore, spiritual refreshment, an invigoration which the soul essentially needs, in this world of sin and misery under whose discipline we are here wisely appointed. And as this comfort by which we are now sustained is neither of divine obligation nor of man’s desert, so it is termed “the comfort of God’s grace.” It presupposes a body of pilgrims, such as Christians we profess to be, who, weary and faint, have

arrived at the midway stage of their journey, hungry and thirsty; our souls need refection. We, as Christians, had considered the miracle of the loaves; we had read in the Gospel for the day how, in the breaking and distribution of bread, this spiritual refection was impressively symbolized, and we believe that he who then fed a multitude in a supernatural way can now, after a spiritual and heavenly manner, refresh our own souls, strengthen our spiritual frame, and forward us on to our heavenly rest. We have been made to feel the absolute necessity of this provision. The gateway to Heaven we find to be trying to our lower nature. The pathway, moreover, is felt to be narrow. The soul must needs be straitened until her salvation is accomplished. But for the heavenly provision implied in the comfort of grace, and ere we had reached our midway, we should have sunk under temptations and dismay. But it is God, the Apostle tells us,* that comforteth us under all our needed discipline. He provides manna for the hungry soul; he comforts the heart which godly sorrow had depressed; furthers us by his continual help; shows us our approaching redemption, and bids us lift up our head. In this way he ministers to our souls the inspiration of hope even unto the end. And, lest some should blindly appropriate to themselves the merit or deserving of this "comfort of grace," we are reminded in our Collect that Christians look for this refreshment only through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let us look, then, first into the narrative with which our text is connected, then improve it to our own edification. "For they considered not the miracle of the loaves." From the

* 2 Cor. i. 4.

narrative we learn, that immediately after the miracle of the loaves, and while the multitude was dispersing, the disciples, as enjoined by our Lord, embarked on the sea of Tiberias, over against Bethsaida, the place of their destination. Soon, however, the wind blew impetuously and adversely; opposing waves dashed against them; each toiling stroke drew heavily upon the laborers; the day, moreover, was far spent—the night was at hand. It is said our Lord saw them toiling in rowing; he witnessed the promptness and alacrity with which they set out; he marked the hardships which grew upon them; he heard the howlings of adverse wind; he witnessed the rude waves aggravating their toil; the deepening shades of night which mantled their hopes: in all, he saw his frail disciples, willing yet weak, toiling but gradually sinking into hopelessness and dismay. At this eventful crisis they were approached by our Lord. It is said, “He cometh unto them walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.” However expressly designed for their succor and comfort, his approach was conducted in an indirect way, and as if undesigned. We shall not wonder at this when we consider that “the comfort of grace” comes to us in this general and seemingly incidental manner. So marked is this economy, that we are often led to ascribe to accident what nevertheless was the design of Providence in our instruction, admonition, or reproof. Our Lord’s appearance was misconceived by the disciples for an apparition. They were scared rather than comforted. Providential interpositions in our behalf run much in this way. But we need look mainly to the course we pursue. Is it the pathway of commanded duty? Is it under the guidance of them who, in the economy of grace, have the

rule over us? Do we walk humbly in relation to God—charitably in relation to man? If so, nothing ambiguous or intimidating in itself—no infirmity reconcilable with an upright mind—should be permitted to distress our minds. But then we should remember that the pathway of commanded duty has a spirit and atmosphere peculiar to itself; and where, in our obedience, these unite, there, in a very peculiar sense, is the sphere of divine compassion; there consistently can God uphold the heart by the comfort of his grace. Our Lord took measures immediately to relieve their minds from all suspense as to the character of this supernatural approach. It is said he talked with them, and saith unto them, “Be of good cheer: it is I: be not afraid. And he went up unto them into the ship, and the wind ceased.” Such was the comfort of his grace. Still they were deficient in the feeling and confidence which so well became them. It is said, “They were sore amazed in themselves, beyond measure, and wondered.” They were hindered by their own infirmities; they did not receive the true impression of Christ’s pastoral care and supernatural power which this interposition was intended to make; they indulged rather in that idle pause of the mind which mere wonder creates; were without reflection on the past; were unprofited by what on that very day had already transpired. It had been an extraordinary day of reflection. They had shared in something which symbolized the Heavenly food. Where there had been comparatively nothing, they had seen enough provided for each of a large multitude—enough for all, enough for evermore—and yet, at this fresh call upon their faith, their feelings were as new and strange in respect to the power of Christ, as though this particular miracle

of calming a boisterous sea had been without precedent in their own history, "For they considered not the miracle of the loaves."

Now, this miracle of refection, as recorded in the Gospel for the day, has a twofold application. In one view it reproves the world of unbelief; in the other, it reproves the Church of inconsideration. That the world has not duly considered the miracle of the loaves, is obvious from its existing relation to God, the judge of all; to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant; and to the Church, which he died to redeem. Mark, at this present holy season, how the world lives absorbed in its own levity, its own carelessness, its own passion, its own prejudice, its own devotedness. Were it even to realize the sum of its aspiration, still, in the consequent neglect of the great salvation, it would be infinitely the loser. But it is sure to be disappointed. The very opening of eternity must be to the world a signal for the relinquishment of all on which its most concentrated concern had been heedlessly expended. It is often monitory to witness the lowering down into the grave of men whose gain of the world, even in so small a measure, has proved to them, there is but too much reason to believe, the loss of Heaven; who had clambered high, as though but to fall into a deeper ruin. God, indeed, has provided evidence of his truth sufficiently conclusive for every honest and reflective mind, but they do not consider it; their heart is hardened; they receive not its impression; they pass on blindly and heedlessly, and are sure to be overtaken and punished. Well, indeed, is it if the day of visitation in their case shall admit of seasonable improvement to humiliation and repentance. Now, the miracle of the loaves, although the Church records to-

day only the testimony of St. John, is attested by all the evangelists, and is the only miracle of our Lord which is so attested. From this circumstance alone we may infer points of interest of no ordinary magnitude; at least it must render less excusable on our part any indulgence of habitual inconsideration and neglect. "The works that I do," said our Lord, "they bear witness of me;"* but of no work can this attestation be more strongly affirmed than of the miracle of the loaves. In addition to the singular force it derives from four distinct recordings by evangelic men, it embraces every particular essential to an enlightened conviction of the truth of Jesus. Do we inquire into the point of time? We learn it was in the open day, when no imposition, with any possibility of success, could be practised. Mark, too, the place. It was in an open plain, alike unfavorable to any fraudulent claim or unfounded pretension: so, also, the number of the witnesses in direct connection with the divine power displayed. It is said, "the men sat down in number about five thousand." The very diversity of the character and disposition of so large a multitude, incidentally gathered, forbids the remotest suspicion of any collusion among them. Regard the circumstances surrounding this miracle with a moment's consideration, and we shall be struck with the open and fearless integrity manifested in its performance. But, if this miracle be authentic—and truly no man, in honesty and candor, will either gainsay or resist its evidence—it most harmoniously unites with a body of other evidence in attesting the Messiahship of the Lord Jesus, his divine character as an ambassador from God to our fallen abode, charged with a life-giving message.

* John v. 36.

We cannot affect this standing truth, but if profited at all, we ourselves must be affected by it. We may truly repent under its conviction, and unfeignedly believe the holy Gospel, or we may carelessly and most unwisely neglect the great salvation. Neither one course nor the other, we say, will affect the character of this miracle, or the mission of our Lord, or the truth of the Gospel which it so powerfully confirms. Consider the miracle or not consider, the issue in both cases will unfold. It will prove either a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death. "For they considered not the miracle of the loaves." The other application of this miracle concerns the Church. This miracle, in alliance with the body of evidence on which revelation is grounded, has in all ages performed its office for the Church. She, under the Spirit of truth, is a believer in Jesus—an humble, penitent believer. Her language in this view is that of Nicodemus, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

But in addition to this convincive office of the miracle, it constitutes, as we may perceive from the manner in which it is referred to in our text, a medium through the Spirit of sanctification to the believer. We need often recur to this miracle of the loaves, and to derive from God, through it, the help and comfort which, under any particular emergency of the soul, we may require. In the first place, its consideration should relieve the mind from any undue solicitude in respect of the necessaries, and even conveniencies of life. Power on earth is within the covenanted assignment made to our Lord. The laws of Providence are under his supervision, overrule, and control. Besides these,

there are supernatural laws which he alone is competent to administer. We are comparatively ignorant and heedless in respect of the operation of supernatural law; but let us be assured we are in many important respects the subjects of it: "Man doth not live by bread only."* "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong."† In application to ourselves, the ordinary laws by which we are governed are not disparaged by supernatural administration. We should consider the miracle of the loaves, not in order to abate our reasonable industry and forecast, but to repress any undue vehemence or absorption of our minds; to relieve us from all corroding cares and anxieties; to rebuke the temptations we meet with to slight religious duty, under plea of pursuing our necessary domestic avocations; in a word, that we may do right things in a right spirit and manner, in devout recognition of supernatural laws; in reverence to a supernatural keeper, and his power of administration where no other can reach.

Were we to judge of some Christian professors by the spirit and manner they evince, we should be led to suppose either that there was no record of the miracle of the loaves, or that, in their case, there was no reflection upon it. Certainly, we should never have supposed that it made the Gospel for the day, gave inspiration to our prayers, and throughout the broad realm of the holy Catholic Church, was now held up as the Mid Lent Lesson for the day. These persons, we might be led to infer, held their way in themselves; were the artificers of their own fortunes; were the subjects only of common or natural law; stood or fell

* Matt. iv. 4.

† Eccl. ix. 11.

by its administration ; were the keepers of their own health, and by their own rules ; were their own shepherds, in their own pastures. How differently is the rule of spirit given by our Lord, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."* There is a supernatural administration which can abundantly compensate for any seeming neglect or disparagement of common law when this may be required, either by the Gospel we profess, or by the guidance of the Church, to which our allegiance is due. Under what prescription, or by what rule or sanction of common law, was the multitude fed ? Was it through any agricultural skill, industry, or management of their own ? Certainly not. They had become interested in the Redeemer—sought him first.

In addition to the divine teaching they received, was added unto them what was needful for the body, and this was done under an administration above nature and peculiar to the truth as it is in Jesus. Surely we should consider the miracle of the loaves ; it accords with the genius of the Gospel ; gives the true idea of the pastoral care of the Redeemer ; and affixes the seal of divine approbation on that higher interest in the concerns of the soul, to which all earthly considerations have been subordinate. "The Lord is my Shepherd," says David, "therefore, can I lack nothing ; he shall feed me in a green pasture, and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort ; he shall convert my soul, and bring me forth into the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake."† To this signal exhibition of his pastoral care, the often

* Matt. vi. 33.

† Ps. xxiii.

disquieted disciples were referred by our Lord himself, "O ye of little faith! why reason ye among yourselves because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?"* Be assured, here is an antidote to all anxious thought amid the unavoidable straits of our earthly pilgrimage. Seek the kingdom of heaven first, and you will have nothing beside of value to seek. What beside is needful in your case, will be added. It will come in, if in no other way, it will come in under the laws of the kingdom of Christ. We have all seen enough to know and believe to our souls' health, that the Lord is a Shepherd to his people; that his pastoral care is often to ourselves as a great deep, in which we may find, indeed, the comfort of grace, but which is unsearchable and past finding out.

Again, contentment with the plain necessities of life, results from a right consideration of the miracle of the loaves. These plain necessities were chosen of God for the sustenance of his people Israel; so such were chosen of Christ also in this exhibition of his pastoral care. Contentment, therefore, with our allotments of life, however plain, is a feature of true godliness. Where God adds temporal blessings to the kingdom of heaven, which had been first sought by us, he adds what is best for us; most convenient; best reconcilable with our eternal interests. But where men assume this responsibility and become engrossed with worldly cares and anxieties, to the neglect of the soul and of all that concerns her well-being, then, by certain laws, their folly will be evinced in two evils. Either they

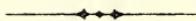
* Matt. xvi. 9.

will smoulder away their existence in disappointment and distraction, or their prosperity and enlargement will prove their ruin. They will add nothing of real value to the possessions by which they are already lumbered. They may, indeed, heap up riches, but they will neither create friendships of this mammon, nor can they venture even a reasonable conjecture into whose hands it shall ultimately fall. It is the dictate of true wisdom that we seek first the true riches, those possessions which fail not, and which elevate and ennoble the soul. Then be content with what God, either through natural law or supernatural administration, may add thereto. But if inconsiderate of the miracle of the loaves, and of the divine principles it comprehends, we surrender ourselves to sumptuous living, with its grovelling pleasures and sensuous gratifications, unmindful of its unfriendly bearings on all without that pertains to God, and on all within that pertains to the soul, why we shall contemptuously disregard the divine wisdom; we shall take the additions under our own control, and but add evil to evil; we shall find no enjoyment in what we possess, but rather be plagued with a spirit of bitterness and discontent. In this way thousands have been numbered with those to whom the Apostle alludes when he speaks of some "who fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition."* "For they considered not the miracle of the loaves."

To conclude—let us not be unmindful of the day we celebrate. It is the Mid Lent Feast Day—the old "Dominica Refectionis," or Sunday of Refection, from which we date afresh our earnest but sober conflicts

* 1 Tim. vi. 9.

with the flesh. As we have been brought thus far, so we may now reasonably expect to be carried through in the spirit of self-denial, and to the health and well-being of the soul. Most devoutly is it to be wished that our subsequent life may take its impression from this holy season. Let us learn from thence to walk more closely with God, to culture a more serious piety, to unfetter our spirit more from earthly bonds, and to rise with greater promptness and alacrity to the life immortal. Let us be truly thankful for "the comfort of grace" which abounds in every stage of our earthly pilgrimage. O how it refreshes the soul with pardon and peace! How it invigorates every holy energy! How it anticipates the period when tears shall be wiped from all eyes, and when every tongue shall combine to swell the anthems of redeeming love.



SERMON VII.

THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST, THE CHRISTIAN'S SPIRIT.

"God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."—Gal. iv. 6.

ONE of the most comfortable and supporting doctrines of the Gospel, is that of a divine influence exercised in our behalf. The Holy Spirit is given to abide with us through our earthly pilgrimage, to heal the diseases of our souls, to elevate our affections, and to qualify us for heaven. Without this supernatural agency in our behalf, the remission of sin by the sacrifice of Christ

would be shorn of its consequential value. We should but resemble a debtor who, having been freely emancipated from the burden of his debts, forthwith involves himself in new and more inextricable entanglements. Pardoned as our sins may be, there is much within our exposure to make us tremble. All our earthly affections tend to excessive indulgence. Our wills are often powerfully averse to that which is good, and as powerfully impelled to that which is evil. The world, moreover, we inhabit, remains the same evil world. The flesh retains all its moral imbecilities. The devil is still a sleepless, prowling, plotting, adversary; the temptations and snares which beset our pathway through life, are as numerous and as seductive as ever.

The forgiveness of our sins is, indeed, a boon of unspeakable value, being an indispensable prerequisite to the endowments of the Spirit. As such, it is freely conferred on all who truly repent, and, in attestation of their faith in Christ, seek to be incorporated into His Holy Church. But in a more enlarged and very important sense, we need to be made partakers of the Holy Ghost. What is affirmed in our text of some, need be affirmed of us individually. "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts crying, Abba, Father." Our purpose, then, is to consider the title of the Holy Spirit in the text in its application to God's dear Son, and through Him to ourselves—"The Spirit of His Son."

Here we may premise, that when the Scriptures refer to the three persons of the adorable Trinity, they speak of them, not so much as they exist in the unity of the Godhead of one substance, power and eternity, as in their subordinated offices under the Gospel dis-

pensation. In this kingdom the Son is subordinate in office to the Father. For the Father spared not His own Son, but gave him up for us all.* The Holy Spirit also is thus subordinate. "For the Father giveth the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."† He is subordinate in office also to the Son. For our ascended Lord sent the Blessed Spirit, as the power of the highest, to abide with His Church. Hence in relation to the Gospel Kingdom, the Holy Spirit is termed by our Lord, when speaking of His disciples, "the Spirit of your Father,"‡ and he is styled by the Prophets, "the Spirit of the Lord God."§ He is named again, "the Spirit of Christ,"|| and in our text, "the Spirit of God's Son." "I will pray the Father," said our Lord, "and He shall give you another Comforter that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth." It appears from this passage that, by his prevailing intercession for us, the Son of God determines the mind and will of His Father. And in this sense we may understand our Lord when, speaking of the Comforter, he says: "Whom I will send unto you from the Father." And thus the Father is represented as sending the Holy Ghost "in the name of Christ." "Whom the Father will send in my name,"¶ that is, on the ground of my intercession and mediatorial authority. This appears to be the order of supernatural agency as set forth in Scripture, in relation to the Kingdom of God. It is presented to our view as a divine Episcopacy of the Kingdom under three aspects of authority. To the Father as to the potential head the Kingdom will be finally delivered up. In the mean time, the Son, who is subordinate to the Father, and whom God hath given

* Rom. viii. 32.

† Luke xi. 13.

‡ Matt. x. 20.

§ Is. lxi. 1.

|| Rom. viii. 9.

¶ John xv. 26; xiv. 16.

to be head over all things to the Church, ever liveth to make intercession for us. But as an effective agency is required on earth, and in our behalf—so God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son to abide in the hearts of His people, and to qualify all in their respective stations to further His will. The lower offices in the Church, such as are filled by men of like passions with ourselves, are but so many adaptations to present circumstances, through which, without terror to our minds, the ministration of the Gospel is conducted. Official ministrations, therefore, should be had in reverence. They are the ministrations of the Spirit, through humble organs. Through these, and with due preparation for their reception, we may expect on scriptural ground that the Holy Ghost will approve Himself our Comforter; that He will withhold no good thing; that He will illuminate our understandings in those spiritual realities which are the objects of faith, and which the world cannot receive, because it seeth them not; that He will comfort and establish our hearts with grace; and after this painful life ended, and the laws of the Kingdom fulfilled, quicken our mortal bodies by His indwelling power.

We proceed to consider the title of the Holy Spirit employed in our text, and our own immediate interest in that title. "The Spirit of His Son." The propriety of this title will appear when we consider that the agency of this blessed Spirit was manifested in every transaction of our Lord's earthly history, from His birth in time to His glorious resurrection. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee," said the Angel to Mary, "and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore, that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall

be called the Son of God.”* As spiritual existences, we are indebted to the same power of the Highest, through a holy mystery for our regeneration, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.”† This Kingdom is spiritual in its nature, and although the world cannot receive it, because it seeth it not; yet he that is born of the Spirit and reared under the Spirit, seeth it with an open eye of faith, and knoweth it to be as real and as authoritative as any kingdom on earth can possibly be. In the Collect for Christmas day, we may find an enlightened recognition by the Church of our interest in that peculiar operation of the Spirit, by which the Son of God was made the Son of man. Having referred to this event, the Collect proceeds: “Grant that we, being regenerate and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit, through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end.” “Ye must be born again,” said our Lord; your citizenship must be heavenly. You must see the Kingdom, realize its power, its Spirit must become your Spirit, its affection your affection, its Ruler must become yours—so shall its hopes be your hopes; and its ultimate triumph and glory, yours for ever.

Again: The Holy Spirit is represented as the author and source of our Lord's peculiar graces for His station in the Church. At His confirmation, the Spirit descended upon Him in form like a dove. It designated His person. It abode on Him. It moreover, anointed Him to preach good tidings to the

* Luke i. 35.

† John iii. 5.

meeke. It sent Him forth to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness. This was our Lord's commission, and He derived it through the Spirit of the Lord God, which was upon Him and abode with Him. As His commission was through the Spirit of the Lord God, so were His peculiar qualifications to execute that commission with glory to God and with edification to His Church. The Prophet is express on this point: "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord."* And have Christians no part in these gracious operations of the Spirit? Most assuredly they have. God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts. Whatever our station in the Church may be, whether official in any degree, or private, the Holy Spirit is its author and fountain. It is assigned us for some wise end, and each person is bound to discover and diligently to secure that end. It may be that our influence in society, our resources in effective means, our personal exertions, our children, are needed in forwarding the grand object for which the Kingdom of God was set up. It may be that the Holy Ghost is moving the hearts of the youth among us, to take upon them the office of a Deacon in the Church

* Is. xi. 3.

of God. It may be that others are moved to gather the outcasts, the children of the poor, the children of the bond, the children of the free, to give them beauty for ashes, the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

Whatever our calling in the Church may be, of this we may be confident; it has its peculiar duties and responsibilities, for the right discharge of which we must seek the aid of the Holy Ghost. We need in our measure the spirit of wisdom and understanding; we need the spirit of counsel and might; we need the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; we need be made of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. O let us seek to know what is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning ourselves, and let us, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, aim to perfect our graces, to glorify our God, and to edify one another, as also ye do. "Know ye not," says an Apostle, "that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you."* "If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His."†

Again: The temptation of our Lord in the wilderness was encountered and repelled under the direction and might of the Holy Spirit. We read: "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."‡ The Spirit for wise purposes exposed our Lord to temptation, and stood by Him as the Spirit of counsel and of might. In this sense also, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." And O, of what indispensable necessity in our own case, is not this office of the Spirit? We pray, indeed, and pray wisely, not to

* 1 Cor. iii. 16-17.

† Rom. viii. 9.

‡ Matt. iv. 1.

be led into temptation. Most wisely do we act, when we studiously avoid it; but the trial of our spirit and obedience not unfrequently requires, that we should be led by the Spirit into manifold temptations. What temptations have not at all times befallen the servants of God? Mark how Abraham was led up of the Spirit to be tried. Seem we not to hear that fearful summons: "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."* See, too, how Job was led up of the Spirit to be tried in soul. See how, under quick succession of calamities, he was stripped of all his possessions and bereaved of his children, standing forth like some blasted veteran of the forest which the storm had ravaged. But where the Spirit leads up, He stands by, the Spirit of counsel and of might. Abraham and Job came off more than conquerors—the Spirit of Christ was their spirit; theirs also His wisdom and strength. And what is man under temptation, destitute of the Spirit of counsel and of might? What his vain confidences, but the morning cloud and the early dew? How comfortable then the consideration, that all our appointed trials will be conducted under the immediate supervision of that Spirit which has proved to our Lord and to His servants, in every age, the Spirit of ready help. "If thy presence go not with me," said Moses, "carry us not up hence;" lead us not into so great temptation. But the Spirit of the Lord God said, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."†

Further: The title of the Holy Spirit, as the

* Gen. xxii. 2.

† Ex. xxxiii. 14, 15.

Spirit of God's Son, is vindicated by the fact that through the agency of this Spirit our Lord cast out devils. "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you."* In at least one instance, this power of the Highest was put forth successfully by our Lord, where the Evil One had resisted either the ordinary measure of that power with which His disciples had been intrusted, or that measure, at least, which they themselves at the time were prepared to put forth. And have we no interest in that divine agency by which these demons were expelled? Are there no inordinate lusts--no inveterate affections of the mind--no indomitable propensions to a resentful or vindictive temper which have pursued us through the past stages of life? Have we mastered the love of money, which is the baneful root of so many evils? Has evil concupiscence received its peremptory rebuke? Do we beware of covetousness? Having food and raiment, are we therewith content? If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, under that peculiar aspect which rebukes the indwelling of the Evil One, which subdues master passions and destroys every subordinate work of the devil, how can he be Christ's? How can the peace of God retain its habitation within his polluted bosom? How can he enjoy the bright attestations of the Spirit which shine upon the soul and mature her blessed hopes, her quietness, and assurance? On the contrary, when God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba Father--when this power of the Highest has, in humble faith and lowliness of spirit, been put forth--what victories over the Evil One have not been achieved?--

* Matt. xii. 28.

what otherwise uncontrollable lusts have not been extinguished?—what clamorous appeals of passion have not been silenced?—what inordinate propensions have not been quenched? How has not the emancipated soul gone forth rich in grateful acknowledgment, and rejoicing in the glorious liberty of the children of God?

Once more—the title of the Holy Spirit we consider is further vindicated when we remember that the Holy Spirit sustained our Lord under all that humiliation, and under all those agonies, which were identified with the atoning sacrifice for our sins. As the Apostle expresses it, “through the Eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot to God.”* Unsupported by the Blessed Comforter, the spirit of the man Christ Jesus must have sunk beneath this accumulated burden of unprecedented sorrow and grief. But there was a joy set before him which enabled him to endure the cross and despise its shame. And, may we not ask, under whose kind ministration were these divine consolations afforded? Who soothed the anguish of his spirit and raised his eye from present humiliation, pain, and death, to the period of his own redemption from the tomb—to the reunion of body and soul—to his glorious ascension—to his session at the right hand of God—to the consideration of the prevailing influence he would there exercise with the Father Almighty in behalf of the present conflicts and future glory of his redeemed people? Did the sinners around him, and whose transgressions he bare, minister to his spirit these consoling anticipations of future joy? Alas! in addition to all other griefs he bare, were the contradictions of these sinners against himself, their cruel

* Heb. ix. 14.

mockings, their insulting ribaldry. Did his disciples minister to his bosom these divine consolations? Alas! they had either forsaken him and fled, or silently looked on, amidst expiring hopes and the fluctuations of painful suspense. No; it was the Holy Spirit, the power of the Highest, the Blessed Comforter that sticketh closer than a brother, who set this joy before the patient, uncomplaining sufferer; it was he who mingled the bitter cup with sweet waters of comfort; "through the Eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot to God." And O! need we not too that God should send forth the Spirit of his Son into our own hearts, crying, Abba, Father? Not to mention those common painful humiliations through which thousands have passed when so far from kind sympathy, we find but little more than the reproach of enemies and the inconsideration of friends. Look to the hour of death, when all that is now seen recedes, and all that is eternal opens in vista upon the view; look to the hour of death, when poor suffering humanity treads the wine-press alone. Shall we not then need to be partakers of the Holy Ghost; shall we not need the Spirit of God's Son in our hearts, whispering to the soul her peace in comforting ministration, setting before her the consoling anticipation of future joy? Listen to suffering Job: "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."* Listen to an Apostle when the Spirit of God's Son was sent forth into his heart; mark the joy that was set before him: "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith;

* Job xix. 25.

henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."* Enough has been said to vindicate the title of the Holy Spirit used in the text, and to show our own immediate interests in that title. For the same reason that the Blessed Spirit was made the Spirit of God's dear Son, was he made our Spirit through Christ's intercession for us. For the same ends that he was sent forth to enrich the heart of God's dear Son, was he sent forth through Christ's intercession to enrich our hearts. Some may need to be regenerated by the Spirit, and made God's children by adoption and grace; some may need spiritual qualifications for their station in the Church; some may need to be sustained in their temptations and upheld in their conflicts with the Evil One; some may need to be delivered from much that is refractory and inordinate in the temper and disposition of their souls, and in the prevailing habits of their lives; some may need to be sustained under the sorrows, the griefs, and humiliations of life. Most assuredly, in the hour of death shall we need the kind ministration of the Spirit to lift up our eyes, to set before us the anticipations of future joy, and under their consoling influence to bear up our fainting spirits, and enable us in that trying hour to glorify our God, to honor our Redeemer, and to show forth how good and gracious the Lord is. Come, thou Spirit of God's dear Son, thou power of the Highest, abide in us, that we may abide in Christ; come, mature our souls' quietness and assurance in this life, and fit them for the enjoyment of unfading glory in the everlasting kingdom.

* 2 Tim. iv. 8.

SERMON VIII.

CHRIST IN HIS PASSION A PATTERN.

“ Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death ; tarry ye here and watch with me ; and he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed.”—Matt. xxvi. 38.

WE have selected this precious fragment of our Lord's Passion, with a view to draw from his example a standing panacea for strong feelings and affections of the mind and heart. Christian people, in common with men of the world, lie open to these strong excitements and depressions ; but while one class surrender themselves to feelings of the moment, and are hurried away into a delirium, the other have been taught by our Lord's example how to retain their judgment and self-possession under all extraordinary emotions of the mind. We should seriously attend to this example of our Lord. Ungovernable affections of mind are discreditable to our holy profession : on the contrary, our control and judicious treatment of them are agreeable to the pattern of Christ, and contribute largely to the preservation of our spiritual health and well-being. Attention here is the more needful, because single acts of this surrender of one's self to strong affections mature themselves into a habit, which first enfeebles, then overbears, and finally destroys its victim. The religion of some professing Christians, as we all have seen, has gradually died out ; and though in some the form may be retained, yet the heart of it is eaten out as by a vulture. In the mean time they do not suspect the cause, and are blind to the effect—at least they account

on false grounds for so deplorable a result. Thus they live on until some overwhelming affliction, or the approach of death, lifts the veil from their hearts. In innumerable instances, as in the case of our Lord, our allotment involves strong pulsations, powerful emotions of the mind. Men are not stones, as stoics would have them to be; neither is it a property of Christ's religion to make them so. Our duty, under the Spirit, is to have recourse to our Blessed Exemplar under similar circumstances; to learn of him how to control and moderate a fervor of sorrow or other emotion which we cannot altogether repress. This is our duty, this is our wisdom. To bring the subject in order before us, we shall first consider our Lord as represented in the text; then the kind and measure of our own emotional susceptibilities. "Then he said unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." The incipient stages of what we term our Lord's Passion are here referred to. This Passion, or state of extreme mental anxiety and suffering, entered into the propitiatory sacrifice of himself for our sins. It was early predicted that the Messiah, when he did appear, should appear as a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows.* The terms, "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," import a deadly sorrow—a concentration of anguish which, left to its own operation, would gradually overpower humanity. The original words import the state of being compassed about by assailants—as when a soldier, detached from his corps, has been surrounded by a hostile troop impetuously bent on his destruction. The assailed party may or may not be able to retain his

* Is. liii.

presence of mind. Ordinarily he yields to his assailants, as if resistance were hopeless, and falls a victim to their ferocity. Instances, however, are on record of cool and determined resistance in such a case. The soldier dies, but is not conquered; the sword is not surrendered, but falls to the ground in death-blow and brandish, and from a hand the life-blood of which has ceased to sustain it. In this view death is the victor, not the assailants; his cause stands; not enfeebled, but enriched and perfumed with the blood of its advocate. This brief exposition will enable us to discern spiritually the circumstance of our Lord's Passion. This Passion implies a combat. He stands alone in mediatorship with God, and in man's behalf. In this position he is surrounded by a troop: wicked men without, blinded by Satan; Satan himself, invisibly, with his militant angels, surround the man Christ Jesus; it was their hour and the power of darkness; they assault his soul in a way awful and mysterious; he feels their power; strong emotions arise with deep depressions; the conflict rages and his anguish concentrates, but his spirit is not overborne; he retains his judgment and determination, his self-possession and control, employing those means of alleviation and support suited to our own nature and use, under like circumstances, and which were best calculated to sustain his conflict. With the progress of this passion, even unto death, we are all familiar. The words employed by the Evangelists, in their history of it, rise in import as the conflict approaches its crisis. It began with the depression of a deadly sorrow; presently we read of an agony, attended with a bloody exudation at the pores; and finally his passion received its appointed measure, under a spiritual desertion in the last hour, as he hung upon the cross.

But his last words, in quotation of prophecy, evidence his unabated self-control. He, indeed, was crucified and slain, but not conquered; there was death, indeed, over his body, but no victory over his cause. He died wielding the word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit—completing the measure of prophecy in his own expiatory blood. Now, as our Lord is said to have borne our griefs and to have carried our sorrows, so we have no reason to believe that his endurance comprehends more, either in kind or degree, than the measure of which our own nature, in itself, is susceptible. We say, in itself; for its capabilities of suffering have never been fully tested by a member of Adam's race. Our Lord endured, in our behalf, the extreme of human suffering; but in respect of mankind, for whom he died, the mercies of Redemption have shorn the allotment of its more terrific forms and degrees. The waters, which in one instance only deluged the world and typified the Redeemer's sufferings once for all, are now limited in their flood by a perpetual decree. Thus far they swell, but no further. What our Lord affirmed of the Jewish tribulation involves a principle of universal application. "Except those days should be shortened there should no flesh be saved; but, for the Elect's sake, those days shall be shortened."* While in this probationary term, the degree and the duration of our suffering are shortened, we find a refuge in death ere our measure is full. It remains for another world, and in respect of those who, in retaining their sins, tread under foot the Son of God and do despite to the Spirit of his grace, to reveal the soul's dread faculty of infinite suffering; but, even under our cur-

* Matt. xxiv. 22.

tailed portion of suffering; men often become wretched and miserable. We need the instruction and guidance of our Lord's example; we need the Spirit of Christ, the mind that was in him, his judgment and presence of mind, his wisdom when under his appointed Passion. We are not stones, we said, neither does it pertain to our holy profession to make us so. We are exhorted by Inspiration to quit ourselves like men, and like men who follow Christ's example under all the strong pulsations incident to the present life. Now, let us look for a moment into the kind and measure of our own emotional susceptibilities. Under a general division our strong currents of feeling are of two kinds, secular and religious.

And first, of secular excitement. That our nature is the subject of strong feelings from the world around us, we need hardly affirm. That these strong feelings in many an instance have become ungovernable, and sold over their victim in bondage to this world, none will venture to deny. Mark that man in the pursuit of gain. Count his feverish pulsations. He is under thorough possession of the spirit of Mammon. It fascinates his imagination by day and by night, absorbs his heart, and makes tame, if not distasteful, all thoughts but those which directly or indirectly relate to itself. If we need palpable and conclusive evidence of the scorching fever that has fastened upon him; look to the spiritual department of his being, as far as by outward signs this may be made visible to the eye. Where with him, is the time, the taste, the inclination or purpose for spiritual engagements? If all diligence be required to work out our own salvation—if in this work the difficulties we meet with, and the obstructions to be surmounted, may justly inspire the most

humble and active servant of the Redeemer with well-founded apprehensions of ultimately falling short, so that now he dare not remit his vigilance or his prayers, or compromit an appointment of grace—if after he has done all, he feels his unprofitableness to the Master he serves, and casts all his care upon that Master's grace, saying, "Lord be merciful to me a sinner, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned," "Be favorable, O Lord, be favorable to thy servant"—if these things pertain to the greenest tree which Heaven has blessed upon earth, then what may not be the spiritual state in the case of the dryest? How will this man appear before Him who, for his redemption, was exceeding sorrowful even unto death; who agonized and bled at the pores, who endured desertion, and died on the cross? How is he now regarded by angels, and by the spirits of those departed saints who, in combat with spiritual enemies, fought valiantly, pouring out their life-blood—ere the sword had fallen from their hands? Mark, too, this devotee of a decent covetousness is unsuspecting of the fever which feeds upon his vitals, and is blind to its effect. He calls the strong feelings which have sold him over into bondage, by specious and imposing names. He feels bound to make his bread. He has duties to his family to perform. He has, moreover, some men to manage, others to persuade, others to outwit, and others to resist. He is kept busy. Alas!—religion, with its claims, its monitions, its awful sanctions, is excluded by the force of his business engrossment. Look, too, at the feverish candidates for power or distinction—or the lovers of pleasure, scorched and dried up in their souls by unhallowed flames. Now what has been said in one instance is applicable to every form of secular excite-

ment, which is likely to overbear the judgment, the conscience, and the heart. Religion, with this temper of mind, is but little more than something to be applauded and laid over. The convenient time has not yet arrived. The man has not a day to lose, nor an hour to spare. He conceives even the Lord's day to be a sore break-in on engagements and pursuits to him of paramount importance. Some of this class would seem to be balanced on a single point. At one moment they incline a little to the duties of religion; but ere a hope of recovery in their case is well inspired, the balance turns—and they are now seen in the full swing of worldly life. But thousands fall, to rise no more from the giddy point on which they had so long turned. Hitherto we have considered cases of avowedly worldly men. But the most deplorable instances of secular excitement are seen and felt among those who have named the name of Christ. How insensibly, to these persons, and yet how surely, has not their declension won its way. Time was, when their neglect of Communion was the subject of pastoral monition. Now, even their worshipping attendance is rare and far between. Their spiritual frame is enervated—their souls are famished. These persons too, affect soft names in accounting for their criminal defection. Well, indeed, will it be, if these soft names avail before God. But we are forewarned of their failure. In the mean time, by a gradual process, the work of defection goes on, until, in some instances among ourselves, we fear every serious thought of the soul has been absorbed in some exciting pursuit which has fascinated the imagination and deluded the heart.

Now it is idle to lament the prevalence of secular excitement. It is matter for remedy, not for tears. It

is time enough to weep over evils, when all the prescribed remedies have failed of success. Secular excitement, where it has gained on the mind and heart in such wise as to compromit in its ardor the stated performance of Christian duty, must be made to suffer violence. A man surrounded by a troop bent on his destruction, has been known to cut his way through. This is the remedy, and the only remedy of which the case admits. This is one momentous use of set times for worship—whether public, family, or private devotion. It breaks the fever of secular absorption, severs the continuity of worldly thought, opens the way through a troop, and wonderfully facilitates our escape. In this view, devout engagements in prayer become a sword of the Spirit, wherewith a seriously-minded person forces his way through surrounding worldly urgencies and importunities. These urgencies call, but he refuses; they eloquently expostulate, but he regards them not.

“Tarry ye here, and watch with me” said our Lord. “And he went a little further and fell on his face and prayed.” Now, all secular depressions are but excitements of the mind in reverse action, and are manageable in the same way. Stated prayer breaks their force and liberates the soul. But this efficacy must depend on the measure of devotional engagement of which we are capable. We must leave the world and its cares behind. “Abide you here,”* said Abraham. “Tarry ye here,” said our Lord. It is the devout prayer of an humble spirit which cuts through the troop. By collating the different narratives of the Evangelists, we shall perceive from the varied postures

* Gen. xxii. 5.

of our Lord in prayer upon this occasion, the deepening humility of his Spirit. St. Luke has it, "He kneeled down and prayed."* St. Matthew, "He fell on his face and prayed."† Taken together, and the transition from kneeling to prostration is significant and familiar to most Christians in their private devotional engagements, and under extraordinary excitements. He first kneeled down; but the body, sympathizing in the increasing humility of soul, was presently prostrated, while offering up, as the Apostle expresses it, "prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, in that he feared."‡ This is the kind of prayer under which the soul is strengthened, and when she rises from the earth, she rises like a giant refreshed with wine. Hence St. Paul to the Hebrews, referring to this agonizing prayer of our Lord in the days of His flesh, adds, "and He was heard." St. Luke records that "there appeared with Him an angel from Heaven on this occasion, strengthening him."§ St. Paul to the Hebrews shows in what this strengthening consisted. The angel "set" joy before him. From that hour our Lord was relieved of all his oppressive apprehensions of death. "He was prepared in spirit to endure the cross, and to despise the shame." O yes! Prayer is a standing remedy for all strong feelings, whether of excitement or depression. "Is any among you afflicted," says an Apostle, "let him pray. Is any merry, let him sing psalms."|| Excitement either way calls for prayer and praise as an antidote. It needs prayer as an in-break; and we may add, must be met with prayer, or it will soon

* Luke xxii. 41.

† Matt. xxvi. 39.

‡ Heb. v. 7.

§ Luke xxii. 43.

|| James v. 13.

assail the soul of our religion as a vulture. A word in relation to religious excitement, and we are done. What is true of secular excitement equally holds good of that which is religious. While it is held in subjection to a right judgment, and made to consist with self-possession and a sacred regard for the decency and order of the Church, it will do no harm to those who are the subjects of it. The favored few, who have grown up in the faith and fear of God, have a calm and equable piety. Their case is not understood by some, and assailed by others. They are charged by some, and on the very account of their equable piety, with being a cold and formal, if not an unconverted people—a people who cannot otherwise than be loved they admit, but whom they judge to be dead to the next world. But in reality, these equable persons, so far from needing excitement, would be seriously injured thereby. Where excitement exists, however, it should be religiously subjected, as was said, to the decency and prescribed order of the Church. This is the safeguard of the soul against wild-fire. The Church sympathizes in the fervent spirit of her Lord: but has no sympathy, concord, or acquiescence in that vehement state of the mind, where the passions have much more sway than either reason, conscience, or the word of God. If at any time, therefore, we should become merry, our hearts filled with transport, and seemingly impatient of control, let us expend our temporary ardor in the prescribed worship of the Church. Let us pray in her prayers, and sing in her psalms. The psalms are the same now as when the Apostle recommended their use as an antidote to a merry heart. The remedy then, is the remedy now. But, if because merry in the heart, we become refractory in

the will, and airy in the head, we need take heed, lest we be hurried away with the wind in a wrong direction. This has befallen thousands who were sincere seekers of God, but who from situation were opened to the influence of religious gusts which carried them off. In like manner must religious depression be broken into by devout prayers. We must pray with our Lord in the Spirit. It is said, "He was heard." So shall the afflicted now be. Some ministering spirit will set joy before them. He will preach to them Jesus and the resurrection, and for the joy thus set before them, they will endure their affliction in patience and humble trust.

But a little while longer, and all our excitement and depressions will be over. The merry and the depressed heart will have mingled their emotions, their prayers, and their psalms; and they shall stand for ever on the mystic "sea of glass mingled with fire,"* having the harps of God, and filled with the quiet fervor of adoring beatitude.

SERMON IX.

CHRIST CRUCIFIED, THE POWER AND WISDOM OF GOD.

"For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."—1 Cor. i. 22-24.

THE Apostles St. James and St. Peter, in their Epistles, quote a passage from Solomon, the truth of

* Rev. xv. 2.

which has been exemplified in every age of the Church. "God resisteth the proud; but giveth grace to the humble."* The passage levels its force against that false principle which exerts an absolute control over the unrenewed heart, we mean the pride of intellect, which exalteth itself against the wisdom of God; arraigns the holy mystery of His mercy in Christ Jesus our Lord; believes it not; receives it not; despises the great salvation. We learn from the text, that this false but controlling principle is by no means peculiar to the present day: but that it existed in the earliest ages of the Gospel, and has always resisted the Holy Ghost, making in itself one of the most formidable obstacles to the saving influence of the Gospel. No sooner were the doctrines of the Cross announced to mankind, than the bigotry of the Jew, and the wisdom of the Greek, were marshalled in opposition. Men, differing from each other in every other respect, with minds imbued with the strongest opposing prejudices, were, nevertheless, agreed in this—to reject the great propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

The varied ground of this rejection will be made manifest while we endeavor to show,—

In what sense the doctrine of Christ crucified proved, first, a stumbling-block to the Jew—afterward, foolishness to the Greek—while to every humble believer, whether Jew or Greek, it approved itself as the power and wisdom of God unto salvation.

It were, indeed, reasonable to suppose, that the claims of the Gospel to be a revelation of the mind and purpose of Almighty God, in the salvation of sinners,

* James iv. 6.—1 Pet. v. 5.

should, in its approach to the world, be accompanied by external evidence of such character and weight, as would make its rejection difficult to a candid mind. Accordingly, this kind of evidence to the Gospel was furnished. We have it in prophecy—in miracles—in the circumstances of its early propagation and in its fruits. Our Lord remonstrated with the Jews on this very ground. Their own Scriptures testified of Him. Had He not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin. It was not his expectation to be received as the promised Messiah, on bare declarations of His own. He challenges their faith on the evidence furnished in those stupendous works which awed the mind of Nicodemus, and of many others, and surrounded his own claims to the Messiahship with a sacred lustre. It was not, therefore, in the absence of sufficient evidence to our Lord's character and mission, that the Jews required a sign; but on the ground that the nature of the evidence submitted by our Lord, did not accord with their preconceived notions. Now, these were grounded on an entire misapprehension of the character and government of the promised Messiah. They looked not for a spiritual deliverer: they looked not for a kingdom, the essential elements of which were righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost: but through a sad perversion of ancient prophecy, were expecting from Heaven a martial prince, under whose banners their nation would be redeemed from the Roman subjugation, under which it was then held. It was their national pride, and not their reason, which required that the evidence afforded of the true Messiah should symbolize and fall in with their own political views; not in the line of benevolent, yet supernatural and signifi-

cant works, which were wrought by our Lord, in raising the dead; in opening the eyes of the blind; in cleansing lepers; in healing the sick; in making the lame to walk; in preaching the Gospel to the poor; pointing in every instance to His own spiritual sovereignty and jurisdiction. Under the sway of a haughty nationality, they were blinded by evil affection, neither could their hearts understand. They required a sign of secular bearing on their national deliverance. Their long-looked for Messiah must descend in visible glory; surrounded with legions of militant angels to crush the Roman power and exalt the standard of Jewish dominion. "The Jews require a sign," and this was the sign they required.

This secular aspect of their Messiah, and martial achievement in their behalf, they held to be the one grand object of his mission; it was to them a required mark or sign of attestation to his person, in the absence of which they were inwardly barred, as they are now barred by an insuperable aversion against every species of moral evidence. These early impressions, fostered by national vanity and consecrated by a corrupted religion, impelled the Jews to look either with indifference or with repulsive and malignant emotion, on the mighty works of our Lord. These were wrought not more to attest his divine character and mission than to enlighten and instruct their minds in the infinitely higher and more important deliverance which their circumstances required. Our Lord assured them that no signs but those indicated in their own Scriptures would be afforded them. They required a sign from Heaven; but, in addition to the miracles he had wrought in coincidence with prophecy, he in due time would give them a sign from the earth. He here points

to his expiatory death and to his glorious resurrection on the third day, prefigured in the person of their Prophet Jonah. Instead of descending from above, as you expect, in worldly splendor, your Messiah, after an expiatory death upon the cross, and burial, will rise from the grave with infinitely greater triumph. Instead of crushing the Roman power, emancipating your nation from its yoke, and elevating its condition to that of earthly supremacy and renown, I shall through death achieve a victory less splendid to the natural eye, but of infinitely greater magnitude in the sight of Heaven. Even the last enemy shall thereby be destroyed, and the true Israel of God, under whatever aspect of earthly name or circumstance, shall be raised to an unfading inheritance of glory. "The Jews require a sign;" but a moment's reflection, under the light even of their own Scriptures, shows that the sign they required was as unauthorized as it was unworthy of a divine mission, and wholly inconsistent both with the genius of true religion and with the character of great humility, in which, for the wisest reasons, God designed, and the prophets foretold, that the Messiah should actually appear. It stood on the face of their records, and if the pride and depravity of their hearts had not poisoned their understandings, they would have perceived it, that the predicted Messiah should appear through the decayed house of David; should live in an obscure and indigent condition of life; should be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; should be despised, rejected, put to death upon the cross, laid in the grave, and should rise triumphantly over all our enemies on the third day. When we consider, therefore, the national prejudice which for ages had colored all their consecrated expectations of a deliverer, their fond con-

ceit of the nature of his deliverance, of the kingdom he would establish, and especially of their own supremacy among the nations as the chosen people of God, we may readily conceive that the subject of the Apostles preaching "Christ crucified," an atonement offering for the sins of the whole world, made in his own flesh, through the eternal Spirit of his own divinity, should prove to the Jews a stumbling-block, a standing occasion of offence as insuperable now as on the day when they assumed, on themselves and their children, the penal consequence of shedding his blood.

We proceed, secondly, to show in what sense the preaching of Christ crucified was foolishness to the Greeks. The Greeks did not object to this doctrine, on the ground of any supposed deficiency in proof. On the contrary, its novelty alone was to them a recommendation. But its merits were to be determined by the debates and subtleties of their own schools. They objected to the manner of its promulgation. This, they judged was insufferably wanting in the attractions of oratory, which beyond the question of truth, sympathized with the taste and refinement of the age—soothed the ears of polite auditories, and entertained their imagination. The preaching of the Apostles was marked with none of that rhetorical flourish to which the Greeks were passionately devoted—which they cultured as their prime wisdom, and by means of which they secured the admiration and won the assent of their delighted hearers. The employment of these adventitious powers in the cause of Christ, the Apostles studiously avoided, and especially in a region where these accomplishments were idolized. "I came not to you with excellency of speech or of wisdom, says the Apostle, "declaring the testimony of God ;

for I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." He put this doctrine exclusively on its own intrinsic power; he exhibited before them, none of those subtle speculations, none of those obtruse points which it was their glory to debate. He presented no theory, according to their custom, built on slender foundations to great heights; inviting the attacks of subtle objection, while prepared in defence with more subtle refinements. This manner of testing and disseminating the Gospel would have much gratified the intellectual vanity of these philosophers, and wonderfully conciliated their favor. But no, the testimony of God was plainly declared by the Apostle, because it concerned not the taste nor the imaginations of men; but the deep-seated necessities of the soul. He preached, "That God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* "That this same Jesus, whom with wicked hands the Jews had crucified and slain, God had raised from the dead and exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins."† But these plain exhibitions of sacred truth were regarded by these philosophers with disdain. They termed them "the foolishness of preaching." Their pride of learning would not submit to a doctrine which was above the reach of their philosophy, and which refused to be tried by the disputes and subtleties of their schools. In vain did St. Paul, waiving the supernatural attestations of the Gospel, challenge these philosophers to compare their boasted wisdom with this foolishness of preaching, and to judge of them

* John iii. 16.

† Acts v. 31.

by their fruit. "Where is the wise?" says he, "where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."* What had these philosophers done for mankind? What had all their acute speculations accomplished for the world? Had they sprung light into the hearts and minds of those who were sitting in the region and shadow of death? Had they cheered the gloom of the cell? had they wiped the tear from the mourner? had they lightened the burdens of the heart? allayed its instinctive fears? Had they done these things too under every form of penury and sorrow? among all nations, under all circumstances? No, indeed; the voice of all history, sacred and profane, says not. The world by wisdom knew not God, and in this ignorance was blind to all besides that concerned the alleviation or cure of its miseries. Amidst the best efforts of philosophy, moreover, the countless multitude was neglected. "Age succeeded to age," in the language of a faithful historian, "and school to school; a thousand systems arose, flourished and fell; but the wretchedness of the multitude remained; no beam of light found its way into their darkness, no drop of consolation into their cup." "But the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."† That very doctrine which the Grecian sage so contemptuously rejected, in a few short years proved itself by its fruits to be Heaven-descended—the power of God in the soul of man—the wisdom of God unto sal-

*1 Cor. i. 20.

† 1 Cor. i. 25.

vation. While the philosophy of Greece, inaccessible to the poor, expended its wisdom in humoring the fancy of admiring circles, affording neither solace in the hour of grief, nor hope in the hour of dissolution—the doctrine of the Cross, penetrating the abodes of wretchedness and the haunts of vice, expanded its healing wings over people of every color, clime, and condition—hushing into calm, the tempest raised in the bosom by conscious guilt—warming into tenderness and contrition, the most obdurate—cheering up the broken in heart—breathing serenity into the bosom, under evils which had staggered the philosopher and driven the worldling mad.

But we anticipate our third proposition, which is to show in what sense the doctrine of the Cross is the power and the wisdom of God unto every humble believer. In the first place, its expiatory sacrifice for the sins of the whole world has reconciled God to sinful man—made our salvation consistent with his own adorable perfections. Be the demerit of man's legal guilt what it may, he himself is not, in penal consequence thereof, appointed unto wrath, as were the angels that sinned, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the declared design of Almighty God in the mission of his Son—not to condemn the Gentile world in vindication of his own people, as the Jews had vainly imagined; but that the whole world, Jew and Gentile, through one oblation once offered, might be saved. This is the good pleasure and favor of Almighty God towards man. We see Jesus made a little lower than the angels, and thereby put into a capacity to suffer death, that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man. With God alone is wisdom to devise; with him alone is

power to execute. And mark the working of this power within the soul of the humble believer. It regenerates his nature through a holy baptism; it destroys the enmity of his carnal mind; reconciles him to God in the mystical body of his Son; introduces him into the presence of a tender and compassionate Father, with liberty and encouragement to unlade his soul of its deathly burden; to pour out his desires, and, asking, to receive, that his joy may be full. Under its own process of salvation, it washes where all was offensive in the eye of God, sanctifies where all was unholy, and justifies where all was merged into condemnation and death. What is further, this executive power is pledged in covenant to the believer, to guide him through the intricacies of life, to uphold his spirit when death has disengaged her from the body, to accompany her through the valley of death to the place of her hope and repose; and finally, to reclaim the body from the dust, to re-unite body and soul, and to usher this new man, a glorified existence, through the gate into the golden city. Mark, too, the wisdom of God discoverable in the manner of first promulgating this doctrine. Its divine Author, that no flesh should glory in his presence, chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, did God choose as the instruments of this power, in bringing to nought doctrines and sentiments which, however pernicious in their tendencies, were at that period in high repute and of most esteem and value among men. As the organs of this power, men were selected who, on every principle of human calculation, were, of all others, the least qualified and the least able to carry it into execution: a

few poor fishermen, of obscure parentage and education, of no learning or eloquence, of no repute or authority; despised as Jews by the rest of the world, and as the most ignoble of Jews by the Jews themselves. These men went out in the single power of the doctrine, preaching Christ, and him crucified; proclaiming him to the world as the one, the true oblation, the sacrificial Lamb of God, once offered, through the eternal Spirit of his own divine nature, a full, perfect, and sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world. And yet, in the excellency of this power, these humble men contended—and, as we all now know, successfully contended—with the prejudices of the world, the superstitions of the people, the interests of the priests, the vanity of philosophers, the pride of the rulers, the malice of the Jews, the wisdom of Greece, and the imperality of Rome. “Where,” we may now truly say, “where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arphad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?”* Where are the colossal powers that stood up, and the wisdom in councils assembled against the Lord and against his anointed? How hath not the Virgin, the daughter of Zion, despised and laughed to scorn the might of principalities and powers?

Within half a century from the resurrection, the heralds of the Cross, amid incredible sufferings and hideous forms of death, had penetrated the remotest bounds of the Roman empire. They had sown the Gospel broadcast over a wide extent of country, and its excellency was attested on all sides around, in quickening and cheering up the souls of men, who had long slumbered in the region of death. The experiment

* Is. xxxvii. 13.

has lasted through more than eighteen centuries. Generation after generation has arisen, tasted of the heavenly gift, and of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come, and has departed in peace; but the Gospel remains the same; working in us all we humbly trust; here but fresh sown; there budding; here blooming; there laden with precious fruit; everywhere, and in every instance of humble faith, preserving body and soul unto everlasting life.

Doubtless the sentiment of the Apostle is the humble boast of us all: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."* I had long sought for peace, we hear one say; for some satisfying good to allay the disquietude of my soul. I sought it in every human channel; I sought it in the gay circle; in the ceaseless rounds of fashionable dissipation and folly. I sought it in the accomplishments of learning and refinement; I sought it in the turbid streams of sensual gratification; in the engrossments of business; in the high road to preferment and honor: but I found it not, till, disappointed and wearied, I cast my distracted, guilty soul at the feet of my crucified Lord, saying "graciously hear me, O Christ; graciously hear me, O Lord Christ." "By thine agony and bloody sweat; by thy cross and passion; by thy precious death and burial; by thy glorious resurrection and ascension; and by the coming of the Holy Ghost: good Lord deliver me." I here find, we hear him say, a quickening power working within my own spirit; releasing me from the tyranny of my oppressors; from the iron grasp of my own unruly will and affection: I find an excellence in

* Gal. vi. 14.

this power, peculiar to itself; kindling within my breast this blessed hope of everlasting life, which God hath given me in the expiatory blood of his Son. Is this, beloved friend, your own experience? Then follow on, we beseech you, in the faith and power of this doctrine, to know the Lord; walk by the same rule; mind the same thing. A crucified Redeemer is to your spirit, salvation; an active, an effective power—a power able to save unto the uttermost, all who come unto God by Him.

SERMON X.

THE DESCENT INTO HELL.

“Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah.”
—1 Peter iii. 18, 19, 20.

OUR thoughts, as a Christian people, have been recently occupied with one of those signal events in our Lord's history which enter into the foundation of a reasonable and religious hope. In this event, the Saviour has been exhibited to our faith as the representative of our guilt,—oppressed, afflicted, crucified, and slain for the sins of the world. But there is a portion of our Lord's history most interesting in itself, embraced also in an Article of the Creed, which is too commonly passed over in our meditations upon His mediatorial acts. We refer to Christ's descent into Hell; His mediatorial visitation, in the disembodied soul of His humanity to

the place of departed spirits, during the short interval which elapsed between the event of His death and that of His resurrection from the dead. Now this descent into Hell, is that portion of our Lord's history on which we purpose to discourse; and to bring it in order before us, and under the best lights and helps we have been able to obtain, we shall consider, first, the general doctrine of an intermediate state; secondly, the particular character of souls referred to in our text, as the subjects of our Lord's visitation; then the particular object of His visitation; and lastly, the bearing of this visitation on our own hopes. First, the general doctrine of an intermediate state. The word "Hell," says an eminent prelate of the Church, is so often applied in common speech, and in the English translation of the New Testament, to the place of torment, that the genuine meaning of the word (in which, however, it is used in many passages of the English Bible) is almost forgotten. The generality of people never hear of Hell, but their thoughts are carried to that dismal place where the fallen angels are kept in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day. But the word "Hell," in its natural import, signifies only the invisible place which is the appointed habitation of departed souls in the interval between death and the general resurrection. "That such a place must be," continues Bishop Horsley, "is indisputable: for when man dieth, his soul dieth not; but returneth unto Him that gave it, to be disposed of at His will and pleasure; which is clearly implied in that admonition of our Saviour, 'Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.'*" But the

* Matt. x. 28.

soul existing after death and separated from the body, though of a nature immaterial, must be in some place. To exist, without relation to place, is one of the incommunicable perfections of the Divine Being; and it is hardly to be conceived, that any created spirit, of however high an order, can be without locality, or without such determination of its existence at any given time to some certain place, that it shall be true to say of it —*here* it is, and not elsewhere. As every departed soul, therefore, must have its place of residence, it is reasonable to suppose, even were the Scriptures silent, that a common mansion is provided, where their nature is similar, since we see, throughout all nature, creatures of the same sort placed together in the same element." Now it is of moment to any enlightened view of the subject, that this definition of the word "Hell" should be retained. It harmonizes the Scriptures; shows the relation of the intermediate state to the life which now is, as well as to the judgment of the great day; and enables us to think soberly and accurately on what God has been pleased to discover. Both the Apostles' Creed and our 3d Article proceed on this definition of the word. All our standard writers agree that the English word "Hell," in its primary meaning, signifies nothing more than the unseen and covered place: "a prison," in the sense of a place of safe keeping, and is properly used both in the Old and New Testament, to render their original words respectively, which denote the invisible mansion of disembodied spirits. But being used also in the translation of the New Testament for that other word, which properly denotes the place of torment, its original meaning is unfortunately forgotten, so that many know of no other Hell but that of the burning lake. Now the burning

lake certainly was not the "Hell" to which the soul of Christ descended—though some learned names incline to this view. But this is not the faith of the Church. She believes, that Christ descended into "Hell," properly so called—to the invisible mansion of departed spirits, and to that region of it, as will presently appear, where the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity. Bishop Hobart confirms the view of Scripture doctrine taken by the great luminaries of the Church of England. The final award of happiness both in body and soul to the righteous, and of torment in body and soul to the wicked, is not made until after the resurrection and judgment of the great day. In the interval, their souls abide in some invisible place, either in the joyful hope of happiness or the tormenting anticipation of misery, when the Lord Jesus comes to judgment. This invisible place is called in our translation of the Bible "Hell," but is denoted in the original by a different word from that, which signifies the Hell of torments. The word, in the original, denotes a secret, an invisible, a covered place—and this originally was the signification of the word "Hell;" though now it is generally used in its bad sense, to denote the place of torment. From what has been said, we may gather how the word Hell is to be understood in the Old Testament usage, and in many portions of the New. Thus the Patriarch Jacob, believing his son Joseph to have been devoured by an evil beast, gives vent to the afflicting emotions of his bosom in these words: "I will go down into the grave, unto my son, mourning."*

* Gen. xxxvii. 35.

The wail of Jacob, in its English dress, would seem to impart merely an unassuageable grief, or refusal to be comforted; but the original word here rendered "the grave" denotes the hell or place of disembodied spirits, where the Patriarch was well assured he should be restored to an object so well beloved. The original word, therefore, mingles consolation with the grief which then afflicted his bosom, as though the Patriarch had said: "Though I shall mourn the untimely death of my son during the remainder of my days, yet I know, that when delivered from the burden of the flesh, I shall go down into Hell, and there find in safe keeping the object of my affection." David, it will be remembered, on the death of his child, has recourse to the same religious ground of consolation: "I shall go to him," obviously referring to the place of departed spirits; "but he shall not return to me."* From these instances of incidental record, we may reasonably infer the faith of the Old Testament saints, which, under distressing providences, consoled their hearts. They anticipated the period, when, in the habitation of departed spirits, their own spirits, when emancipated from the body, would enjoy renewed intercourse and communion with departed friends. This faith must have been derived from the earliest patriarchal revelations, as it unquestionably went forth under the dispersion with other important doctrines, and is found among heathen writers of antiquity. Indeed, no nation, however degenerate, has yet been discovered, among whom the doctrine of a future recognition in some mysterious place, has not in some form, more or less corrupt, very generally prevailed. Now the Gos-

* 2 Sam. xii. 23.

pel Revelation confirms the doctrine in substance so universally diffused. While it recognizes the "*Hell*" or place of safe keeping, it divides the mansion into two distinct regions for the separate abode of the righteous and the wicked. From a narrative by our Lord it appears, that between these two regions there is a great gulf, which, whatever its nature may be, forbids intercommunication. The increased vitality and vigor of the disembodied soul, and its capacity to communicate with other spirits and to receive communications, are also interesting truths discoverable under the Gospel irradiations. In its separated state, the soul of our Lord's humanity preached to other souls, which would seem to imply intellectual activity with an eminent capacity to communicate with other spirits. "Being put to death in the flesh; but quickened by the Spirit."

Mark the series of oppositions here involved. On one side the power of darkness putting to death the body of our Lord's humanity; on the other, the power of the Holy Ghost, and through the instrumentality of that very death, quickening the soul with an immeasurable accession of vitality and energy. Thus it becomes clear, that the soul, so far from being in the least impaired by the death of the body, in faculties and powers, receives under a law of the covenant and through death as an instrument, and from the Holy Ghost as the agent, "a quickening," a large increase of intellectual and spiritual power. Not unlike to an eagle long imprisoned, but now uncaged, she inhales from afar the balmy inspiration of Heaven; new classes of instincts and energies are awakened; in the fellowship of happy spirits reposing in the pure serene of

light, she feels with unutterable joy the new life and love of the salvation of God.

Such then is the doctrine of the intermediate state, which the Scriptures assert and the Church humbly maintains. It is observable, moreover, that when St. Peter refers to that memorable prophecy of David—"Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption"*—he applies the prophecy to our Lord. But if, in the fulfilment of the prophecy, we have the best interpretation of the prophecy itself, then, as sure as crucifixion, death, and burial, were within the allotment of Christ's body, so sure was the soul of His humanity to descend into Hell; and as sure as His body was to be raised from the dead, seeing no corruption, so sure was His soul not to be left in Hell, whither it went; but in reunion with the body was to constitute that perfect humanity of Christ, which would ascend into Heaven, and there occupy a station of dignity, power, and felicity, fitly denoted by a session at the right hand of God. In perfect agreement with this prophecy, St. Peter asserts in our text, that our Lord being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit, went and preached to the spirits in prison. That our Lord's human soul should descend into Hell, was, as we may infer from the prophecy, a requirement on his mediatorial character, under the general scheme of redemption, portrayed by the Prophets. This scheme required that he should take our nature upon him, sin only excepted, and fulfil the entire condition of humanity in every period and stage of man's existence, from the commencement of life, to the reunion of His soul

* Acts ii. 31.

and body. It was necessary, that the way of every believer in his return to God, should be explored throughout by our covenanted Forerunner. The Captain of our Salvation, who now sitteth at the right hand of God, is intimately acquainted with every want and apprehension of our spiritual nature, and is able to succor us under every possible exigency of our spiritual course. "It behoved him," says an Apostle, "to be made in all things like unto his brethren."* The same wonderful scheme of humiliation, says Bishop Horsley, which required that the Son of God should be conceived and born, and put to death, made it equally necessary that His soul, in its intermediate state, should be gathered to the souls of the departed saints. This brings us to the second point we were to consider—the particular character of the souls in prison, who were the subjects of our Lord's visitation. This character is implied in the terms of the text. It is there described as the character of those "which sometime were disobedient." The terms "sometime were disobedient," obviously imply a recovery to God from that state of disobedience. St. Paul, in his Epistles, employs the same word of expression to denote a reasonable recovery to God, or change from a state of impenitence to a state of humble faith. "Ye who sometime were far off."† "For ye were sometime darkness."‡ "You that were sometime alienated."§ "We ourselves also were sometime foolish, disobedient."|| In our text the terms denote a change in character among the antediluvians, effected by God through the preaching of Noah and the sign of the ark, antecedently to the flood which swept them away. With

* Heb. ii. 17. † Eph. ii. 13. ‡ v. 8. § Col. i. 21. || Tit. iii. 3.

the exception of eight persons, reserved within the ark for a special end, they all perished in the waters, but an intimation is registered in our text, that many were saved everlastingly. Not but that "sometime they were disobedient;" but they timely vindicated the truth of Almighty God by their repentance, and the holiness of Almighty God by their faith. This was counted to them, as it is now counted to us, for justification; and though their bodies perished in the flood, their souls, under a law of the covenant, went into their own place, to await the resurrection of the just.

"To-day," said our Lord to one, who sometime was disobedient, but now penitent and believing; "to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."* By Paradise, therefore, or "Abraham's bosom," as the Jews termed it, we understand that particular region of Hades, assigned to the souls of those who, having finished their course in faith, do now rest from their labors. This, we say, is the region which was cheered by the visitation of our Lord, and this is the particular character of those whose souls, at the period of our Lord's descent into Hell, occupied that invisible abode.

We proceed to the third subject for notice: The object of our Lord's visitation into this particular region of Hades. Our text asserts that "He there preached to the spirits." To preach, is to proclaim glad tidings with authority and power; and it is a property of preaching, as thus defined, to allay spiritual apprehensions, and to quiet the soul in God. That the preaching of our Lord referred to, was not the preaching of repentance, we may well conclude. This applies only to our probationary term. Moreover, it

* Luke xxiii. 43.

was through this kind of preaching, as an instrument of God, and while within their probation, that they were recovered to Himself, and their names written in the Lamb's book of life. Now, when St. Paul refers to these spirits, he employs this remarkable language: "And these," says the Apostle, "all having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they, without us, should not be made perfect."* That is, although the patriarchal and legal dispensations of the Church furnished a great cloud of witnesses, men who obtained a good report through faith, and whose souls when disburdened of the flesh found an abundant entrance into the Paradise of God; yet not having received the promise of the Messiah's manifestation, their Church state in that invisible place must needs be imperfect; not comparable possibly with our own, under the Gospel dispensation, either in spiritual knowledge, quietness, or assurance. God, in the dispensations of His grace, having so ordered, that the spirits in prison, prior to the Gospel dispensation of the Church, should not be perfected in repose, until this perfectness should be imparted to them, as it was imparted to us, by the mediatorial proclamation of our Lord himself. As the Apostle expresses it, "that they, without us, should not be made perfect." Jesus, says the Evangelist, "knowing that all things were now accomplished," all things concerning the Holy Sacrifice, whereby the Church was to be perfected, saith, "I thirst;" according to the prophecy, "In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Presently, it

* Heb. xi. 39.

is added, He said, "It is finished." He then "bowed His head and gave up the Ghost."*

Thus was closed that one offering of himself by which, the Apostle tells us, "he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified,"† accomplished all that was necessary to insure to every humble believer, from the beginning to the end of time, his perfect consummation and bliss in God's eternal and everlasting glory. Here are glad tidings, worthy to be proclaimed by our Lord himself, as on earth so in the Paradise of God. And if the Church on earth, while commemorating the Holy Sacrifice which hath perfected her for ever, ascribes all glory to Almighty God our Heavenly Father, for an atonement-offering so full, so perfect, so sufficient for the sins of the whole world, so expressive of God's great love towards us; so significant as a pledge of all other gifts, so fruitful to her bosom in holy quietness and assurance—then, may we not ask, what intelligence besides could have been more acceptable to the spirits in prison? When the soul of a penitent believer now enters the Paradise of God, she bears within herself an incorporation of what the Apostle terms "the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ."‡ Her sentiment this side the grave is that of Simeon when he handled the Word of Life. Her ears have heard, and her eyes have seen, and her faith is enriched; she is ready to depart in peace. But from what source but that of an authoritative revelation could the spirits in prison have derived this strong consolation? Contemplate, then, at this blessed season, the Lord of Glory disembodied, as were the subjects of His visitation, passing through the valley and shadow of death, en-

* John xix. 30.

† Heb. x. 14.

‡ Rom. xv. 29.

tering within this mysterious abode, attesting His own identity with the great antitype of their faith, proclaiming the accomplishment of the Holy Sacrifice, and ratifying and confirming for ever their assurance of an interest in it. Should the question arise, why especial reference in our text should be made to the antediluvian spirits of Noah's generation, we may recall to mind that this particular generation had lived in furthest remove from God, was the chief of sinful generations of all others before or since, the least spiritual, the most sensualized in heart and mind. It is referred to in our text as, in a very peculiar sense, the subject of God's patient waiting and forbearance. Even the number who relented under the preaching of Noah, and were recovered in season unto God, when from the world of spirits they reflected back on the flagrancy of their sins, and especially on the unparalleled visitation which had closed their probation, must have been disquieted beyond all other spirits with forebodings of the future, and have peculiarly needed the strong consolation. They seem to be referred to in our text in the way of emphasis, and the legitimate inference from their mention would seem to be, that not even the spirits in prison, of that generation, were excepted; but where sin had abounded, the grace of the Holy Sacrifice did much more abound, in all godly quietness and assurance. These spirits are now described by the Apostle as the "spirits of just men made perfect,"* brought up to the Gospel measure of paradisaical illumination, joy, and felicity. Be this, however, as it may, it interferes not with the bearing of this mediatorial visitation on our own hopes. That our Lord

* Heb. xii. 23.

went into the place of departed spirits is asserted in our text: that, while there, he proclaimed certain glad tidings to a particular character of souls, as clearly appears. One inference from so much is indisputable: Christ's descent into hell and the asserted capabilities of His disembodied soul while there, confute all those dismal notions of death which sometimes obtrude into the hearts of penitent and believing men, often attended, too, with gloom and despondence.

The body, indeed, was taken from the dust, and unto dust shall it return. The sentence is inscribed upon its mortal frame. But, by a law of the Covenant, the shock which disembodies the soul introduces her, if penitent and believing, into her own place, within an element of joy and felicity. The souls of those who were here united on Christian principles, and in the bonds of penitence, faith, and charity, will most surely meet in a place far better than earth can afford, and under circumstances of far more exceeding joy.

The Christian parent, though now despoiled of his best earthly hope, will shortly go down unto that beloved spirit; and the child, though now mourning its bereavement in a revered parent—will shortly go down unto that beloved inmate of the invisible place. The Christian friend will go down unto friend, and brother unto brother; while each will find the other—as the soul of Christ's humanity is exhibited in our text—possessed of active powers, and exercising them within its own sphere and in quickened degree. Each will be capable of communicating with other spirits, and of receiving communications from the disembodied representatives of all nations, and kindred, and people, from the beginning to the end of time. There, the family of faith—here providentially broken, in every

external bond, and scattered in its members, between whom mountains may now lift their heads, and oceans swell—will be restored in every essential feature of its unity. “Christ was made so truly man,” says Bishop Horsley, “that whatever took place in the human nature of Christ, may be considered as a model and example of what must take place in a certain due proportion and degree, in every man united to Him.” None will be disposed to doubt the Scriptural justness of this remark. The Son of God was made like unto us, that we, through the Spirit, might become like unto Him in all things. As His soul was not left in Hell, neither will the souls of His people be left in that region of incomplete felicity. The keys of death and of hell are in His keeping, and in the fulness of time the doors of the Prison House, at His token, will wide unfold, and the paradise of God, in beauteous order, shall pour forth her myriads of disembodied souls to be reunited to glorious bodies, spiritual and incorruptible, to be for ever with the Lord and in perfect consummation of their bliss.

Finally: Let the doctrine of Christ’s descent into Hell, while it comforts both the dying penitent and the surviving friend with an assurance, that no evil is to be apprehended in that intermediate state through which the soul is destined to pass—incite the careless among us to repentance. My impenitent friends: There is a region of Hell, and severed from Paradise by a great gulf, unvisited and uncheered by our Lord. There the finally impenitent and unbelieving lift up their eyes, but to behold afar off a region of joy and felicity which they themselves have forfeited for ever. Then must begin the corrosions of the undying worm, and the awful forebodings of unquenchable fire. These are

but the beginnings of sorrows. These miserable spirits, who, by other spirits as miserable as themselves, had long been galled under execration and reproach, must come forth under a resurrection of damnation. The awful penalty of unsubdued rebellion, will now light upon them. There stretches far and wide, bottomless Gehenna, flaming with smoking torment—a vindication in itself of all that God has done, and of all that Christ hath suffered, and of all that the Spirit hath indited, and of all that the Church has testified from generation to generation. “Tophet is ordained of old.”* But it was not prepared for man, even in the remotest stage of his apostacy from God. “For God hath not appointed us to wrath: but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.”† It was prepared for the devil and his angels, and may become man’s only by confederacy with that rebel principality, in insult of God’s authority, in contempt of His mercy, and in defiance of His power. But, beloved friends, though we thus speak in exposition of God’s truth, we are persuaded better things of you, and things which accompany salvation. Sometime disobedient, indeed, the best have been; but with some among you, there may have been no recovery to God, because no repentance towards God; no faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, no sanctification through the Spirit. O let the time past of life, with such, suffice. It is time to awake out of sleep. It is time to repent and believe the Gospel. Trifle not, we beseech you, with God’s mercies. Rather, in true repentance and faith unfeigned, lay a good foundation of hope in death;—that when the soul shall be expelled, the body, whether suddenly or by slower

* Is. xxx. 33.

† 1 Thess. v. 9.

process—she may find an intermediate habitation of joy and felicity. God Almighty grant that our souls may be individually counted worthy to follow the soul of Christ's humanity into that blessed place; there to mingle with the spirits of just men made perfect, and to await with them in blissful expectation, the eternal crown and the waving palm.

SERMON XI.

THE POWER OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION IN THE FAITHFUL.

“ And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”—Rom. i. 4.

At this season of the ecclesiastical year, and under the guidance of the Church, we contemplate with peculiar interest whatever may relate to the Resurrection of our Lord, and also the correlative truths from this source which immediately concern ourselves. In this view, “ Jesus and the Resurrection”* is to the Church an inexhaustible storehouse of enrichment. The character and claims of our Lord, it will be remembered, even under the demonstration of the Spirit, afforded in stupendous miracles, had been obstinately contested by the Jews; but, after his crucifixion, death, and burial, even the minds of his disciples were oppressed with gloom and uncertainty. In the Scripture narratives we every where discover, at this period, the sentiments and feelings of despondence. “ We trusted,” said two

* Acts xvii. 18.

of his disciples, "that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel."* But when, instead of being seated on a throne, He had been seen by them agonizing on the Cross, even unto death, their faith staggered. The bright hope which once gilded their bosoms, had yielded to painful doubt. Scarcely within the faith of the most steadfast heart, abode the wonderful truth of which intimations had been given by our Lord, that the cloud which then hung over the Church, was but an appointed prelude to his own glorious triumph. It will be remembered also, that our Lord had been numbered by the Jews with the transgressors; had been condemned at their tribunals, as a blasphemer, "because he made himself the Son of God."† His crucifixion was held by them not only as a just punishment, but as a practical refutation, before all the people, of his character and claims. "If thou be the Son of God," say they, "come down from the Cross."‡ This challenge spread from the rulers to the populace, and was reiterated in scoffs and contumelious taunts. In the face, and under the patient endurance of these cruel mockings, the Lord of Glory became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross, therein fulfilling the law of that disinherited nature He had assumed. So far was permitted, by what the Evangelist terms "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God;"§ but at this point the triumph of the power of darkness ended; it went not a line beyond what was necessary in the wisdom of Almighty God for accomplishing his own gracious purpose. Scarcely, in his death upon the Cross, had the humiliation of the Eternal Son reached its appointed depth, when some incipient tokens ap-

* Luke xxiv. 21. † John xix. 7. ‡ Matt. xxvii. 40. § Acts ii. 23.

peared, that the real victory, however obscured to the Jews by evil hearts of unbelief, was on the side of Him whom with wicked hands they had crucified and slain. An earthquake at this period was ominous; strange apparitions had awed the minds of many. A rent in the vail of the temple, from the bottom to the top, had excited attention. These signs had awakened, in the minds of many, a foreboding that all was not over. The judgment of the Roman centurion was, doubtless, the misgiving in the minds of thousands. "Truly," said he, "this was the Son of God."* But it was on the third day, according to the Scriptures, when, in the glorious Resurrection of our Lord, the theory of ungodliness which had hitherto prevailed, was overturned, and the eternal Sonship of the Lord our Redeemer was authoritatively declared. This is the declaration referred to in our text, which signifies that the Resurrection of our Lord is that declarative event in His history which, beyond all other attestations of a divine energy, most powerfully and convincingly assures to the Church, the eternal Sonship of her Redeemer.

Now it requires but ordinary reflection to perceive, that the divine economy, which, in the holy Incarnation of our Lord, and the succeeding events of His life, proportioned the evidence of Sonship, is that same economy which now, in the stages of our spiritual progression, proportions evidence of our adoption; for we are planted together, not only in the likeness of Christ's holy Incarnation, but in the likeness of His death, and in the likeness also of His resurrection. These spiritual conformations in our own case may be justly re-

* Matt. xxvii. 54.

garded as so many demonstrations to our adoption. But of one only can it be pre-eminently on Scriptural ground affirmed, that it is declarative in its nature—that is, removes all doubt of the fact. “And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” This is the topic for present discourse. We may here premise, that, as the mystery of Christ’s holy Incarnation comprehended within itself the element of all, which, according to the Spirit of holiness, was developed in His life, His death, His resurrection, and ascension into Heaven; so, in our own case, the holy mystery of our baptism comprises within itself, not merely an express conformation to Christ in his holy Incarnation; but the supernatural element of all succeeding conformations, not excepting that particular one, which, in its nature, is declarative and final on the question of our adoption. In all that ensued upon our Lord’s Incarnation we may perceive,—there was development of energy according to the Spirit of holiness, but no new origination: it is just so in the mystery of our holy baptism. Our being successively conformed unto Christ is development only of spiritual life before imparted. This is expressly asserted by our Lord himself when he says, “But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”* The origination within the soul is, in “the water,” freely given by our Lord. The Apostle, on this point, is even more express. “And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power, in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands;—buried with him in baptism,

* John iv. 14.

wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”* We are accustomed to regard the baptismal mystery and to speak of it in a very restrained sense; but we should not forget that as baptism has within itself the essential root of confirmation to Christ, both in respect of the body and of the soul, in His eternal and everlasting glory, so in the present life we see but little of a baptized existence, even in its best estate, and even what we do see we see through a glass darkly; but when the spirit shall come forth, which the Redeemer had washed, and be reunited to a body made glorious and incorruptible; in a word, when Christ appears in all His glory, and we shall be like Him, then, and not till then, shall we adequately conceive of the nature and comprehension of the Christian baptism. In the mean time we must earnestly endeavor to interest our souls in those spiritual conformations to Christ, which lead to that spiritual resurrection or rising with Christ into newness of life, which is effected through the faith that is of the operation of God. The primary mark of our adoption, therefore, is in our baptism. We are said to be “washed, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”† So also it is said, “By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.”‡ That one Spirit is God the Holy Ghost. Whatever may be truly affirmed of the office and ministry of the Church, as the appointed organ of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost himself is the real baptizer. As Christians, we are “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God;”§ born according to the Spirit of ho-

* Col. ii. 10, 11, 12. † 1 Cor. vi. 11. ‡ 1 Cor. xii. 13. § John i. 13.

liness, whose energy was exerted in the Incarnation of the eternal Son of God. We can scarcely have failed to notice, that our baptismal service proceeds on this principle; hence such devotional sentiments as these: "Give thy Holy Spirit to this infant, or to this person, that he may be born again and be made an heir of everlasting salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ." So also, "Wash him and sanctify him with the Holy Ghost, that he, being delivered from thy wrath, may be received into the ark of Christ's Church."

The faith held by the Church, and which characterizes her baptismal office, would seem to be this: She has been empowered by her Lord to act as an organ, though in herself an earthen vessel, an unworthy organ of the Holy Ghost—in the due administration of this holy mystery. The Church does not originate. Her office and ministry is to declare and pronounce what God has done. Again: The Church has faith in God's word, to believe also, that her devout prayers through the merits and intercession of her adorable Lord, are ever heard—and that God is even more ready to give the Holy Spirit, than is an earthly parent to give good things, at the earnest entreaty of his own children. Nothing doubting, therefore, of God's faithfulness, in respect of His Son, nor of His truth in the fulfilment of promise, she proceeds in the humble exercise of her office and ministry in relation to any, who may come hither, desiring to receive the sacrament of baptism. She has faith, moreover, in God's word to believe, that she obtains that for which, according to the will of God, she humbly and devoutly asks—that the Holy Ghost, in the particular case of her administration, is really and truly given—that "in a circumcision without hands," as the Apostle expresses it, that is,

in a manner heavenly in itself, supernatural in respect of us, and invisible to mortal eye as is the wind that bloweth,—He has truly regenerated this person, and sanctified him with a gift, which in itself is an element of eternal life. That having thus delivered him from the wrath to which his nature was bonded, and made him a child of God by adoption, He incorporates him forthwith into the mystical body of Christ. Here he becomes an accountable instrument of the gift he has received, in working out his own salvation: he is bid, therefore, by an Apostle, to work this salvation out “with fear and trembling,”* with a godly reverence and humility, under assurance of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, whose office it is to influence his will and to empower his obedience. Now in being thus made conformable to the holy Incarnation of our Lord, truly it may be said, the Lord hath done great things for us. But let it be remembered, this early stage in our baptismal history, is not by itself declarative on the question of our adoption. The contrary of this truth, was the error of the Jews under their dispensation. They assumed to be the sons of Abraham, because of a lineal descent from that holy Father. But our Lord taught them that this lineal descent, though real, was not declarative of their sonship. “If ye were Abraham’s children,” said our Lord, “ye would do the works of Abraham.”† He was the Father of the faithful only. The works of faith, therefore, were declarative on the question of their Sonship; to which all other relations to the Father of the faithful, were only ministrative. According to the Spirit of holiness, the eternal Sonship of our Lord is not declared with power by

* Phil. ii. 12.

† John viii. 39.

the mystery of His holy Incarnation, but by His resurrection from the dead. So, would we, ourselves, escape a dangerous error, we must look beyond that in our baptism, which is outward, to that within this holy mystery, which is declarative of our adoption. The Scriptures abound in monitions on this point. We read, "how a branch in Christ may be barren and unfruitful, and of the awful destiny of every such branch."* We read how a man, endowed of God, buried his gift in the earth, and how he was condemned not merely as a slothful, but as a wicked servant.† We read of a gifted fig-tree, marked with sterility; and of the sentence of extermination, which hung over it.‡ So we read of a gifted vineyard, where the declarative stage, so far from being in kind with all that had preceded, was contrary in kind; and how, finally, it was cursed of its proprietor.§ So also, we read of earth, which received, indeed, and drank in the rain from heaven; but so far from bringing forth herbs meet for them by whom it was dressed, it brought forth thorns and briers, and how it was rejected, and was nigh unto cursing; whose end was to be burned.|| And the Apostle leaves us no doubt of the application of these pictures, when he speaks of the liability of those who have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, to fall away;¶ who, so far from realizing that stage in their baptism which is declarative of their sonship, fall back into a spiritual apostacy, repudiating thereby the gift, and putting the Son of God—both in His spirit and in His body, to an open shame. All these things show us, not that

* John xv. 2.

§ Is. v. 4, 5.

† Matt. xxv. 26.

|| Heb. vi. 7, 8.

‡ Luke xiii. 6, 7.

¶ Heb. vi. 4, 5.

baptism is less the holy mystery of our salvation ; but that the instruments of the Heavenly Gift, through unfaithfulness, may not only forfeit the end of faith, but aggravate thereby their condemnation and ruin. "I hate the sin of unfaithfulness,"* said David. Every chosen instrument of a gift, should hate that sin with a perfect hatred.

Again: As our spiritual confirmation to the mystery of Christ's holy Incarnation is not, by itself, declarative in respect to our true adoption--so, likewise, is not our spiritual conformation unto His death. The declaration of eternal Sonship, mentioned in our text, according to the Spirit of holiness, was not in the death of our Lord, however precious in the sight of God was this death ; but in His resurrection. Through that faith which is of the operation of God, we die unto sin. But we must not stop here, else it would be as though our Lord had remained in the tomb. Then His eternal Sonship, according to the Spirit of holiness, would never have been declared with power. That remained to be declared by His resurrection from the dead ; which shows us clearly that, however Christian, in its place, may be the mortification of the flesh with its affections and lusts, this is no substitute for our spiritual vivification. There is a living unto righteousness, as well as a death unto sin. It is not less within our holy baptism to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, than to put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."† So also, we are to

* Ps. ci. 3.

† Rom. vi. 5.

account ourselves not only "to be dead indeed unto sin ; but" to be "alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."* And again : To yield ourselves "unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and" our "members as instruments of righteousness unto God."† This vivification of practical power, makes us conformable to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We begin to realize ourselves to be God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works."‡ Hence, as the eternal Sonship of our blessed Redeemer was powerfully declared by His resurrection from the dead—so in our own case, this vivification of soul and body in the service of God, is declarative of our adoption. It proclaims us to be sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty ; and this with power, and according to the Spirit of holiness. And because this peculiar conformation unto Christ, is declarative of adoption, it is final. We need no other assuring testimony on this point. What is more, it is an intelligible evidence, and, we may add, by the rule of Scripture, the sole evidence possible, and a most satisfactory evidence of the reality of our faith. We do not say, that this vivification of soul and body, consists in performing this particular duty or that. Many who are exemplary in some points of view, are sadly defective in others. Every man has one or more very commendable qualities. Rare is that night in which no star shines, nor dazzling meteor flits athwart the gloom. Still, on the other side, there is no one grace of the Spirit, or characteristic of the spiritual mind, which has not its appropriate outward evidence ; and in proportion as these external acts are multiplied and varied in respect of all that God has commanded and Christ

* Rom. vi. 11.

† vi. 13.

‡ Eph. ii. 10.

exemplified in acts of mind and heart, in doing and suffering the will of God—so does the voice proceeding from thence, become declarative of adoption, with increasing power, and the evidence stronger and more consoling to the heart. We must live under a calm but abiding determination, to serve God with a perfect heart; to obey Him in things small and in things great. Others may rely on moods and feelings—they may entangle their hearts with a deceit of words. But the inspiration of the Apostle remains the same. “Hereby,” says he, “do we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.”* The obedience of faith is alone declarative of faith, just as the operations of the soul are alone declarative of the soul. Evidence must be seen and felt. We do not say that a revived soul and body in the service of God, creates our sonship—no more than the eternal Sonship of our Lord was created by His resurrection; but in all the properties of the spiritual mind we need something declarative of their existence, something conclusive, something consoling to the heart and mind, something which, when we say, “Our Father,” returns to the soul with assuring confidence, that we are the children of God. The Spirit itself, indeed, affords this inward testimony; but let us be assured it comes to our spirits through our confirmation to the resurrection of Christ. What is affirmed of our Lord’s eternal Sonship, is true also of our adoption. “Declared to be the children of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by their resurrection from the dead.”

* 1 John ii. 3.

SERMON XII.

CHRIST STILL SUFFERING IN HIS MEMBERS FOR THE
CHURCH'S SAKE.

“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church.”
—Col. i. 24.

To improve bodily suffering in our own case, and rightly to appreciate its patient endurance in the case of those, who having finished their course in faith, do now rest from their labors, we must aim, under the light of inspiration, to apprehend the true doctrine respecting such suffering. We must not be guided by the world in its loose generalities of thought, in relation to these things. Within the oracles of God there is a great light which may shine into our hearts, and surround our bodily affliction with new and most sacred associations. If we look into our text, we shall make three important discoveries. First: That the bodily suffering which the Apostle endured, he accounted as Christ's property in his flesh, something intrusted with him as with a steward, for a specific purpose. He therefore terms it, “the afflictions of Christ in his flesh.” Secondly: That the specific end of his Redeemer in this appointment to suffering, was, in some way or other, unknown to himself, connected with the edification of the Church. Lastly: That in this view of his bodily affliction—of its ownership and of its end, he rejoiced in it—was greatly comforted and sustained under its pressure—had cheerfully endured a part, and was hastening forward, though he

knew not either the appointed measure or the duration which awaited his endurance. One thing he knew. He was daily filling up that which was behind, as a willing servant patiently prosecutes the work assigned him, daily diminishing the sum of requisition, without knowing how or when the issue would unfold. "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for His body's sake, which is the Church." Now when we have duly considered these three points, we shall not be without some spiritual understanding of what is implied in suffering, as the Apostle suffered "in his flesh;" in suffering patiently, confidingly, and with a heart seasoned with grace: in suffering on Christian principles; in a Christian spirit, and with Christian affection; in a word, as the Apostle elsewhere expresses it, "in suffering as a Christian."* And First: Whatever be the immediate or natural source of bodily suffering, whether we find it in the pathway of duty, as the primitive disciples found it; or as consequent on early and forgotten sins; or in the way of providential visitation, as in sickness, acute pains, or wasting maladies: know we certainly, under spiritual illumination, that if patiently and confidingly endured, it is transformed into Christ's affliction in our flesh. His becomes its ownership. It is His as endured by Him who bare our sicknesses. It is His by sympathetic affection, as the head sympathizes with the suffering members: lastly, it is His by overrule of natural laws and appropriation to His own use. If we look into the prescribed Order for the Visitation of the Sick, we shall find its leading sentiments to have originated

* 1 Pet. iv. 16.

in this fundamental truth, we mean Christ's property in our bodily affliction, there termed "God's visitation." Bodily affliction, therefore, when spiritually regarded, is seen and felt to be no creature of our own. Consequently, it is not to be unlawfully evaded when we are called thereto, or dealt with, when upon us, in an irreligious or unseemly way, as though our first and great concern were a mere deliverance, irrespective of God's will and purpose in the visitation. It is the property of Christ in the flesh of His people; a sprinkle of His own agony; a baptismal effusion of His own bloody sweat. Not meritorious, indeed, and procuring as His were; but a sign of our baptism into His death; of communion with His sufferings; of our being made like unto Christ in His passive endurance. It is a taking up, as it were, a relic of Christ's affliction, as some precious mantle dropped from the Cross, and wearing it for His sake. "Filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for His body's sake, which is the Church." Now let us look at the circumstances of our Lord, for the servant is not greater than his master. "This is He," says an Apostle, "that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ: not by water only, but by water and blood;"* not merely as a fountain of grace, but as a combatant with sin, Satan, and death, consecrated to this function and as the Captain of our salvation made perfect, through suffering. When the spirit of ancient prophecy lifted up her head and discerned the Redeemer, she describes him to us as she beheld him: she saw "a man of sorrows—red in his apparel—his garments like him that treadeth in the wine fat."† The apparel would seem

* 1 John v. 6.

† Isaiah.

to denote the body wherewith the divinity of the Son of God was enshrined; the color, its consecration to suffering, affliction, and patience. The duplication of the figure would seem to import no ordinary degree of trial. All this was fulfilled in our adorable Redeemer. Christ suffered for us in the flesh. His sufferings were as a cup given Him to drink, and, though in itself it was distasteful and repulsive to His humanity, yet He claimed no license to deal with that cup as with a creature of His own. If it were possible, indeed, consistently with the divine will and purpose, gladly would He have been spared this agony; but the will of His Heavenly Father and not His own, was the supreme law and determination of His mind. He drank deeper and deeper into that cup of suffering, filling up that which was behind of the appointed affliction in His flesh, until in the last convulsive throes of His agonized humanity; His expiatory work was accomplished. "It is finished,"* said our Lord. Finished, not evaded. Finished in the sense of a happy issue. Finished in accordance with the Father's will.

And what think you, beloved friends? Are we, having been brought so nigh to God by this atonement suffering—are we, I say, to escape a sprinkle of that suffering? Is there no baptismal fire in which our own souls are deeply interested? Is there nothing to be taken up in our fellowship with Christ's affliction? no tribulation to be encountered in a world like yours? Shall we, as followers of Christ, think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try us, as though some strange thing had happened unto us? Surely not. All Scripture shows that in our nature there is

* John xix. 30.

a mysterious connection between nearness to Christ, and bodily affliction, a connection, which, in this life, we cannot dissolve. But it shows also, that it is our privilege, our interest, and our duty to be greatly comforted and sustained in this particular aspect of our fellowship with Christ. This wonderful economy was early disclosed in the history of our Lord. His very infancy, we read, brought the sword on the infants of Bethlehem. His image, where it was even suspected to exist, was called to a holy martyrdom. Scarcely had the blessed Virgin-mother pressed Him to her breast, ere she was warned by inspiration, of the penalty of that fearful privilege. "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also."* We have learned how most of His Apostles through life, long suffering, were conducted to a violent death; and it is remarkable that the aspiration of two youthful Apostles to be the nearest His person in His kingdom, was met by a premonition of the penalty which the privilege involved. "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"† In exact accordance with these precedents, the Apostles in their Epistles, every where remind us of this necessary, though mysterious appointment. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into His death?"‡ As though the heavenly washing pointed to a sacrament of bodily suffering. This, in the superlative sense, indeed, may apply to martyrdom, yet we are assured that all affliction borne in faith and patience, will be accounted a modification of that mystical death into which we have been baptized; a mark

* Luke ii. 35.

† Matt. xx. 22.

‡ Rom. vi. 3.

of Christ in our body; a grace token from the Redeemer of our fellowship in His sufferings; acceptable to Him and rewardable for His sake in the great day. So true it is that our light afflictions which are but for a moment, these marks of the Lord Jesus in our body, these grace tokens of sacred fellowship, when spiritually discerned and appreciated by us, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Now all men suffer bodily affliction; so does the brute creation; but it is faith and patience only which consecrate these sufferings. In virtue of these graces of the Spirit, the afflictions in our flesh become Christ's; His marks, His grace-pledges, as confirmatory to their subject, of a reasonable, religious, and holy hope, as they are edifying to the Church around. And O! what edification has not the Church in all ages derived from this source! How has not her faith been established, and her hope enlivened, and her consolation enriched! "There are three that bear witness in earth,"* and one of these witnesses is declared to be "blood:" the consecrated sufferings of the humble believer. Not, indeed, that all Christians must necessarily be called to this endurance. It is a glorious privilege to which all with James and John dare not aspire, though all are sacramentally sealed and set apart for this endurance. But all are premonished with the Holy Mother, of what must and will befall, that all may be ready in heart and mind unto this obedience, when the requisition upon them shall be exacted. Be this as it may. "We count them happy, which endure."† We count the consecrated sufferer honored within the Father's house; yea, privileged beyond his

* 1 John v. 7.

† James v. 11.

fellows. We count them happy, in whose flesh the holy flame is made to burn with an unextinguishable glow; who patiently endure the sacramental fire, till the ownership of their affliction is attested, and the affliction itself transformed into the marks of the Lord Jesus, the signs of His divine acceptance and favor. "My brethren," says an Apostle, "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations."* "Blessed is the man," says he, "that endureth; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him." "Take, my brethren, the Prophets, as an example of suffering, affliction, and patience. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; how that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." Indeed, our text in the second proposition now to be considered, reveals this doctrine—that the end of the Lord, in the bodily affliction of His people, is not merely with reference to their individual sanctification and honor, but is in some way or other, how or when, unknown to the sufferer, connected with the edification of the Church. It is appointed for the body's sake, which is the Church, and no unfriendly power shall intercept it in the line of that appointment. Lamentable, indeed, is the consideration that even Christ's expiatory sufferings and patience will be of no other effect to many, than to aggravate their guilt and ruin.

This unhappy result may be expected also in relation to all the consecrated sufferings of stricken saints in all ages and in every section of the Church. St. John refers to some who, so far from being edified under examples of suffering, affliction, and patience, were not

* James i. 2.

improved under their own personal afflictions. "They gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of Heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds."*

But what if some do not believe—shall their unbelief make the examples of suffering, affliction, and of patience of no effect to others? God forbid. The body of God's stricken saints shall not return to the dust void, neither the spirit to God who gave it. There are three that bare record on earth—the spirit, the water, and the blood. These three witnesses for God agree in one testimony, and many will receive this testimony in the confirmation of their own faith and to the saving of their own souls, "Filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for his body's sake, which is the Church." In the first place, it may be appointed by the Redeemer, as the Church expresses it, "to correct and amend in the sufferer himself whatsoever doth offend the eyes of his Heavenly Father."† Certain it is, that of all instrumentalities, bodily affliction, and especially in its earlier stages and first-fruits, most accurately detects and exposes the prevailing selfishness of the human heart. A man under bodily suffering, if he surrender himself to its natural working, will exhibit the most concentrated selfishness. Himself will become the centre and circumference of his thought: what is worse, this selfishness, which the fire in his bones has sweated out, will, in every form of its unseemliness, be leniently regarded; his pain justifies his impatience; the weakness of his nerves excuses his irritability; his own case absorbs all other cases, was rarely equalled, never surpassed, and, it would

* Rev. xvi. 10, 11.

† Visitation of the Sick.

seem, has issued license to its subject to be querulous, self-willed, fastidious, and egotistical; too much in his case can neither be said nor done. All this is very natural. Now, bodily affliction has not created all this spiritual unseemliness, much less its justification, but revealed it only. Neither does Christ condemn the sufferer, but through this chosen instrumentality makes manifest to himself what doth offend the eyes of His Heavenly Father. He, indeed, under this manifestation to ourselves, looks for our humiliation; and, in due time, if this humiliation be wrought within us, His own sacramental fire will consume our selfishness, under every aspect and form of its offensiveness. The affliction in our flesh will become His property, and the ownership will be attested in the quietness, the meekness, the suavity, and gentleness of our own minds. Look to that expiatory victim as he agonized on the Cross; mark the indications of that mind which was in Christ Jesus. "I thirst," says he; which shows that the infirmities of our nature were felt and acknowledged. But we see the calmness and serenity of his moral frame. His mother, his beloved disciple, a poor sufferer by his side, his very murderers—all shared in his sympathies and benedictions at the very moment when his own body was agonized. We see something of this mind in the suffering Stephen, attesting the ownership of his affliction. Bruised and broken with stones, he expresses but two desires: one in relation to his own spirit, that the Lord Jesus would receive it; the other in relation to his murderers, that God would forgive them. Indeed it has happened to most of us to witness, in higher or lower degrees, a kindred spirit under suffering affliction. The same in kind, though differing in degree, as one star differeth from another star in glory,

but all in tune like David's harp, singing together in sweet concert, and proclaiming the ownership in all to be divine. We have witnessed the seasoning of grace of which the heart and mind are susceptible under bodily affliction. We have seen how the blood may unite its testimony to that of water and the spirit, "Filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for his body's sake, which is the Church." But the text in the last proposition, now to be considered, introduces us to a very elevated, but attainable grace; we mean that, in the experience of bodily suffering and in a believing view of its ownership and of its end—the Apostle rejoiced in it as a servant would rejoice in a privilege not common to his fellows, and which bespoke his master's confidence, approbation and favor. The Apostle, we may perceive, loved the Church of God, which he esteemed as the mystical body of Christ held in perpetuity, and to go down to the end of the world. His heart was infinitely beyond his active power or passive endurance; he could neither do nor suffer too much for the body of Christ's sake, which is the Church. Its prosperity was the object also of his heart's desire and of his prayers; he had faith to believe that even his bodily sufferings would be consecrated, accepted of Christ, and in some way or other employed for the edification of the Church. The Apostle's confidence was not misplaced. The true servants of the Redeemer, in all ages, have caught from the record of these sufferings a holy inspiration, peculiar in its kind, and as ennobling in its influence, as it is confirmatory in its testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus.

They have armed themselves with the same mind, and when called into their fiery trials, have approved their faith, their patience, their constancy, even unto

the end. They have died in the faith, swelling the great cloud of witnesses who compass us about; who now survey our conflicts and cheer our hearts, while we fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in our flesh.

To conclude: The Church has ever needed, and will still need, living examples of suffering, affliction and patience; succession of men and women baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire, burning and shining lights, who bear in their flesh the marks of the Lord Jesus; the grace tokens of their ascended Master. O let us individually remember, that we are by sacramental consecration as sheep appointed to the slaughter! Where are the aspirants among us for sacred nearness to Christ, warned as we are of the connection of this privilege with bodily affliction? Who among us is able to be baptized with the baptism wherewith the Master was baptized—to wear the precious mantle our friends have dropped, rejoicing in these afflictions in view of their ownership and of their end. Of one thing we are sure; though we dare not aspire to the exalted privilege of suffering in the flesh for the body of Christ's sake, which is the Church; yet we are admonished to be found ready in heart and mind if called out for this service. "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."* We shall certainly need this armor when we come to die. Death has its peculiar pains. The separation of the soul from the body is not without its agonies, agonies known to him only who is the subject of them—fiercer within perhaps, when all without, discernible to human eye, has sunk into the

* 1 Pet. iv. 1.

stillness of death. The Church refers to these mysterious pains, and in one of her most impassioned appeals to the Redeemer, beseeches that in our last moments, these pains of death may not unsettle our faith and leave the soul to stagger on the margin of Eternity.* Beloved friends, let us aim assiduously and in dependence on the Spirit for the sanctification of our nature. Then we shall make less ado under our bodily ailments—be less absorbed in our own pains—less studious of our own ease—have fewer wayward wishes. Let us learn ever to look unto Jesus, our great Exemplar of bearing the pains of humanity with patience. Blessed is the man that endureth affliction; blessed is the man that filleth up that which is behind, daily diminishing his allotment of suffering, nor wishing his measure less—but rather in sweet and humble frame awaiting the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.



SERMON XIII.

THE WOMAN OF THE CITY AT OUR LORD'S FEET.

“And He turned unto the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman?”—Luke vii. 44.

THE Scripture narratives are the more instructive to seriously minded persons, because of the diversity of cases they bring to view, and also the divine judgment in each case either expressed or implied. In one

* Burial Service.

sense, indeed, all these cases are alike. Their subjects have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. Yet all, because thus circumstanced, are not alike in the spirit and affection of their minds, and hence, do not sustain the same relation to God. "The Lord knoweth them that are His."* He has ways and means of His own, whereby the spirits of men are tried and their character determined. He applies certain tests, unknown to ourselves at the time, or disregarded, but which nevertheless give a certain result, satisfactory to Himself and conclusive. As Job expresses it, "He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him. But He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."† But the Scripture judgment of character is often in reverse of human decision. The rule of estimation is different. We judge by the outward appearance, but the Lord searcheth the heart and trieth the reins. We approve often where the Scripture judgment condemns. We regard superciliously, where the case, as rightly understood, is more hopeful than our own. Thus we read how the Publican was justified rather than the punctilious Pharisee. So also, how the servants of Naaman the Syrian, beyond their master, had a right understanding of the Lord's way. So also we read, how the foolish things of the world, or things held to be so by the rule of worldly estimation, and the weak things of the world;—aye, and the base things of the world and things which are despised, are often chosen of God to confound and bring to nought the things which on natural principles we hold to be wise and strong. So also, in our narrative, we shall presently see how the

* 2 Tim. ii. 19.

† Job xxiii. 9.

spirit of Simon, a high-minded and honorable man among the Jews, a Pharisee, received its rebuke through the penitential affection of an unfortunate woman, in bad repute, and whom he affected to despise. This is a standing feature of the divine economy, and the reason of it is thus assigned by an Apostle, "That no flesh should glory in His presence."*

Let us now glance at the very instructive narrative before us. It calls our attention to a woman of the city of Nain. With the early history of her misfortunes we are left in entire ignorance. Of this much, however, we may be assured—her Judge will be intimately acquainted with the providential circumstances under which she received her being; with those also under which she was nurtured; with her means and opportunities of moral and religious improvement; with the peculiar trials and temptations which crossed her path. He knows also, and has registered, the author and the instrument of her early overthrow and ruin. All these things are written in a book, and in due time will certainly come abroad in the revelations of the judgment. Another point of her case, on which we are uninformed, is where or on what occasion of our Lord's preaching this woman received her effectual call to repentance and faith. Indeed, of such single importance is the conversion itself, as seemingly to have absorbed all the mere circumstances of time, place, or instrumentality employed. On all these points the narrative is silent, while the pardon of her sins is unequivocally declared and pronounced. It is, indeed, ominous of delusion, where the mind is occupied with incidental matters of unimportant consideration.

* 1 Cor. i. 29.

Remission of sin, where real, is marked with lively affection combined with unaffected humility. Its fruits are manifest. These may be seen and read of all; but the remission itself is too deeply wrought within our spiritual frame to be scanned by him who is the subject of it. It is observable in the narrative of this pardoned sinner, whose spirit and affection won the approval of our Lord, that not a word from her mouth is recorded. Her Redeemer is her spokesman, and, for the instruction of every age, He fixes the evidence of her pardon in the lowly and affectionate service of her heart. Her expressive acts, prompted by this affection, however construed by others, were all appreciated by Him; but it is plain, from the narrative, that neither the pardon of her sins nor its proper evidence, was intelligible to her until the declaration to this effect was made by our Lord himself. Humble-minded Christians, in point of fact, are higher in the divine estimation than could in any wise be inferred from any judgment, frame, or feeling of their own. They are not the less exalted of God because of their low self-estimation. At the very moment when the lowly affection of this true penitent was most apparent and least understood, either by herself or by Simon, she receives this gracious testimony from our Lord: "Thy sins are forgiven;" and again, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." Now, what was said unto this woman is said unto all of like humble and active faith. Such persons, indeed, from the very humility of their spirits, are often slow of heart to appropriate to themselves the comfort of the divine testimony; but this distrust of one's state, when combined with an obedient frame, so far from operating a prejudice to our justification, is in reality its friendly ally and safeguard. The justification of a

sinner is made to depend not on the comfort of it he may enjoy, but on the humility of the faith he may possess. The Lord of Life pardoneth and absolveth all those whom his Spirit leads to true repentance and faith unfeigned: He incorporates them into His own mystical body, and there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who thus walk after the Spirit. They have a well-assured portion in Christ, and they will humbly and gratefully leave this portion where it is, in Him, available to their own souls through the daily supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. They crave not now a division of the estate, neither would they now receive into their own keeping the portion of goods which falleth unto them. They now need, indeed, their daily bread, to be fed under the ministration of the Spirit with food convenient for them. They now need a daily remission of sins. They need a daily support measured, by the depression of their souls; daily supplies of strength, proportioned to the combats and assaults to be encountered. They need the inhabitation of the Holy One, and His daily ministrations, to diffuse through the soul the gracious temperament of filial trust and affection. They need this supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ under its varied aspects and according to the varied necessities of each succeeding day. Their portion is not the less appreciable by them, because vested in a Divine Trustee, who knoweth their necessities before they ask, and their ignorance in asking, and who of God is made unto them wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, dividing unto every man severally as He will. They look forward beyond the confines of this militant state, to another and higher state of existence, and to circumstances and dignity suited to this state,

when the Holy Father will divide His living among His blessed children, and when these children now humbly asking, now gratefully receiving their daily bread; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things; shall receive the kingdom, be clothed with royalty, and enter into the fulness of its joy. For the present, they are quiet and thankful. They are content with the food and the raiment which the soul requires. They are not in despair, however perplexed; not destroyed, however cast down; anticipating, in body and soul, the manifestation of the life of Jesus, though now in both they bear about the humiliation of His death. Now, this divine economy, even where well understood, is too often disregarded. We are not at all times reconciled at heart to the rule of discipline to which we are here subjected. We conceive the condition assigned us to be rather a pauperism than a parental discipline; a state under which the soul is straitened even to perplexity. Not but that the daily ministration keeps pace with our necessities; but we want a religion to speak of, something for ostentation and show, something to gratify our vanity as well as to supply our needs. If left to ourselves, we should choose a festival dispensation preceded by no fast; we should clothe ourselves in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day. We should choose a house in the heavens for present habitation, and a chariot of fire wherein to visit the earth. To say the least, we conceive our circumstances to be too dependent on our Divine Master. The daily bread, moreover, is furnished us only in sufficiency. There is nothing to be lost. We are ordered to gather up the crumbs. We are tied to the Father's house and to

its daily ministrations. Our service of many years has never, at any time, been rewarded, even with a kid to make merry with our friends. No doubt can be entertained that the straitness of the gate of life and the narrowness of its way, in the absence of a right spirit, have proved a stumbling-block to many a discontented soul, and unsettled its faith. They become disaffected to their Father's house and to the dispensation of the Spirit which there presides. Often, with the Prodigal, they call for a division; gather together all they have, bid farewell to the strait gate and take their journey into a far country. In the mean time, these persons have never considered their manner of spirit. Their judgments are ill-informed on what religion is, and their hearts misdirected in the pursuit. Their wisdom is deficient in lowliness, their faith in docility, their walk in reverence and godly fear. The only cure of their case, and which the Scriptures record, is to give them their heart's desire; to put within their own keeping and under their own control, the portion of goods which falleth to them; to surrender them to the extravagance of their own imagination and the plenitude of their own joy; happy, indeed, will it be, if in the issue, they find the grace implied in coming to one's self, and returning to their Father's House. Now in the first recorded intimation we have of the woman before us, she is found at the feet of our Lord, as He sat at meat, a guest of Simon a Pharisee. She had learned her Lord's appointment, and to be with Christ at such times, and in the lowly character and engagement of a maid-servant, was the limit of her heart's desire. Here, then, is made visible to our faith a primary mark in the spirit and affection of a pardoned sinner.

He will earnestly desire to be with Christ, in whom and in behalf of sinners God has been graciously pleased to record His name, and to vouchsafe His promise to come unto them and to bless them. In this view, Christ was typified under a former dispensation by a set place of divine appointment. To record the divine name implies a consecration, and a consecrated person or place implies the divine inhabitation. "Even unto His habitation shall ye seek, and thither shalt thou come."* But for the trial of faith and holy affection, it is so wisely ordered, that an approach to that place where the Holy One has recorded His name, and where He has promised to come and to bless, should be attended with spiritual difficulties. It implies a victory over many obstructions to be found in Christ; in communing with the Holy Father; ministering the service of the heart and receiving blessings. If we advert to the occasion, we shall perceive the difficulties this woman must have encountered in prosecuting her pious purpose. Our Lord was the guest of a Pharisee, and we all know something of the Pharisaic character: it was a wretched intermixture of all those self-assuming, self-excusing and self-justifying principles of our fallen nature, which by severity of judgment in respect of others, compounds for its own derelictions. This woman must have well known and understood the character of a Pharisee, and the contumely in which she herself was held. She knew and felt herself to be a sinner, just of that grade of notoriety on which the Pharisaical zeal expended its rage. She must have foreboded a scornful repulse from that door as she ap-

* Deut. xii. 5.

proached it. There was not an individual beneath that roof, save a compassionate Redeemer, who, as she well knew, would not shrink from the defilement of her approach. Her difficulty was increased by the conviction, that her present moral frame could neither be understood nor appreciated by the master of that house.

Of all strange phenomena, that of a broken and contrite heart, flowing in the tenderness of its affection, is to the Pharisaical temper of mind the most unaccountable, the least explicable on any acknowledged principles of its own. The peculiar temper which the sense of pardoning love inspires, and which in every age distinguishes the servants of the Redeemer—and the absence of which the Christian laments as the loss of something intrinsically precious—is, when beheld by a Pharisee, resolved into a species of mental imbecility to which he himself is infinitely superior. Scarcely had this woman, with a trembling heart, taken position as a maid-servant behind our Lord, bedewing His feet with tears, now wiping them with the glory of her head, now anointing them with precious ointment, finding in these lowly offices to her Redeemer something in unison with her grateful pulse, while the heart of this old Pharisee, under its own peculiar promptings, was setting itself to work on the scene before him, and was hastening to its own conclusion; at this very moment, his graceless thought was suddenly arrested by our Lord in a formal address. Through an apposite parable of the two insolvent debtors who were respectively forgiven, our Lord unfolds to the Pharisee how natural in itself, and artless in the woman, was this expression towards himself, of grateful reverential feeling and affection. He had released this woman from an over-

powering burden of the heart, the least fraction of which she herself was unable to remove. Was it marvellous that she should seek the place where His name was recorded, to make some poor returns, as far as she was able, in thankful acknowledgment of her Lord? He himself needed not her personal attendance, nor her heartfelt emotions, nor her kind offices; but for her own sake, and in sanctification of her own soul, and as an example to others, where His grace was imparted, of public confession of His name, He highly appreciated this demonstration on her part, of penitence, and faith, and love. To impress the mind of Simon still deeper with the principle involved in the spectacle before him, our Lord brings into affecting contrast his own measured equivocal concessions with the whole-heart devotedness of the woman before him. Simon himself, indeed, had tendered honor to our Lord, according to the heartless fashion of the world. All those delicate attentions and offices which more eloquently bespeak the interest of the heart in the person of the guest, and in such view were common to the age, he had entirely dispensed with. "Seest thou this woman?" said our Lord; "where thou hast withheld the water of the brook, she hath gratefully tendered the fountain of her tears; her tresses have supplied a napkin; her precious unguent has anointed my feet, which she had first bathed with the kiss of adoration." What a contrast is not here exhibited between a pardoned sinner and one who bears about a burden of unexpiated guilt! And we may perceive that the contrast is not drawn between an avowed enemy of the Gospel and a pardoned sinner, but between a pardoned sinner and a description of character which of all others takes best with the generality of mankind—the man of correct deportment;

an honorable, high-minded man, in the worldly sense; a man who yields much respect to religion, hears its ministers gladly; entertains its chief officers; does many things, and, wherever the concession involves a share in the honor implied, or at least will not interfere with other and leading considerations of worldly moment, is willing to do much more. The world has abounded, in all ages, with this description of character; men of hereditary attachment to the Church, who are ambitious to represent her under all her secular aspects. She has appeals, too, which touch certain properties of their nature and open their purse. She has occasions, too, which vibrate on certain chords and excite their zeal; but as to any real seriousness or liveliness of affection, implied in seeking Christ with a whole heart—*here* and *there*, as his name may be recorded and his presence assured, and this, too, in the face of the world's Pharisees—why, such concession has never entered into their hearts. They have witnessed, indeed, something of this liveliness of affection in others; but then it was always accounted for by well known peculiarities. These were notorious sinners, or they were weak-minded persons, or they were persons of a naturally warm and enthusiastic temperament, bordering on the fanatical; at least, they did not occupy that elevated position in the world, nor those commanding walks which they themselves, in virtue of superior worth, then occupied.

Herod the king went fully as far as these worldly men go. He heard John gladly, who was less in vocational dignity than the least in the kingdom of God. He was willing to do much, and actually did many things; though not the one thing which was needful to be done, yet quite enough, as doubtless he sup-

posed, for one of his commanding rank and station in the world. But what then? Has that searching interrogatory in our text been changed or modified? "Seest thou this woman?" Has the standard of right affection, here implied, been made to accommodate itself to this or that man's secular views or assumed importance? Is the contrast drawn by our Lord, between His honorable host and the penitent woman at His feet, thereby in the least altered? Is it not as glaring now as then, and as distinguishing between the pardoned and the unpardoned sinner?—between him that loveth much, and him who in loving little but loves himself the more? Surely such persuasion, however common within the Church, can never have come through our holy calling. A thousand considerations of worldly moment will superinduce a little love and much respect for Christ and His religion; but it is the pardon of sins only, when attested to the soul in the vale of her humiliation and by the Spirit of God, which will interest the whole heart, and stir the whole soul into a serious, earnest, unwearied seeking of the Saviour, in every place and engagement He has consecrated by His name and presence. It is the pardon of sins which acts within the soul, as an invisible element of life, drawing out in Christ's behalf, and bringing into gracious exercise, the best, the most humble, the most contrite, the warmest affection. "We love Him," says an Apostle, "because He first loved us."* We seek Him early, seriously, and affectionately, because He first sought us, found us in our low estate, and left behind Him an indelible impression of His love. Now this early, whole-hearted seeking of Christ

* 1 John iv. 19.

in all humility, where His name is recorded and His presence assured, and His blessing promised, is a Scripture mark of justification, and it grows brighter in proportion to the real difficulties which faith overcomes.

Another characteristic of a pardoned sinner is the grievous remembrance of those sins, which, nevertheless, have been graciously forgiven. We hear not, indeed, a word from this woman concerning her sins. But "Seest thou this woman?" Note her position and her engagements, and shall we doubt for a moment that the remembrance of her sins was grievous unto her; the burden of them intolerable? The Scripture doctrine appears to be this. We neither clearly see nor fully estimate the sinfulness of our sins, until, through some elementary stages of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, our sins are pardoned and done away. Then the guilt and defilement we had contracted begin to open upon our vision. The remembrance is more grievous than ever. The heart breaks under its perplexities, and we show before God our trouble, and God speaks comfortably to that contrite heart which His grace had pardoned. And every Christian has, more or less, experienced of this economy, and well knows that he is never more truly penitent, than when the pardoning love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Spirit of His grace. This peculiarity of the divine economy, in which the pardon of sins, under the Spirit, becomes an instrument in perfecting our repentance, was early revealed through the Prophet Ezekiel. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your

own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.”* To this interesting economy, the Apostle refers in a passage to the Romans. “Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”† Surely we should mark this gracious economy. “Seest thou this woman?” Let us sincerely reflect whether, with her, we have been brought to this grievous remembrance of our sins, loathing ourselves in the humiliating survey of all their aggravations, and turning, in the liveliness of faith and affection, unto Him in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

The last characteristic of a pardoned sinner we shall notice, is his unfeigned preference for the low places in the grateful service of his Lord. That is, for those pious and useful but unobtrusive engagements, which bring with them no worldly note or repute, but rest for their reward on the divine approbation. “Seest thou this woman?” Mark, she sits unobtrusively behind our Lord at His feet. Her chosen position is there. There also are her chosen engagements. When Abigail was called to a high place by David the king, “She arose, and bowed herself on her face to the earth, and said, Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.”‡ St. Paul chose for himself the title “The chief of sinners.” Let us remember the characteristic of this pardoned woman, to which our attention is called, is an ardent but lowly affection. It was an active affection; a self-denying affection; unaspiring in itself, yet de-

* Ezek. xx. 43.

† Rom. ii. 4.

‡ 1 Sam. xxv. 41.

lightful to her. Let us be assured the pardon of sin, through the operation of the Spirit, shall be known by its fruits. Show me these fruits, and on the testimony of our adorable Lord, I will show you a pardoned sinner. He may be ignorant of his own state. He may not even understand the significance of humility, contrition, and love, in determining his own character. He may be following on, weeping, now trembling, now rejoicing. We can readily conceive the vicissitudes of his frames of feeling; but his character with God, is superior to and independent of them all. He is a man serving the Lord in all humility, and sooner or later will be honorably dismissed with these gracious words, "Go in peace, thy faith hath saved thee."



SERMON XIV.

THE HOLY GHOST THE SPIRIT OF POWER.

"Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."—
Acts i. 8.

THE promise recorded in our text was made by our Lord to His disciples at the period of His ascension, and our Church in her Festival of Whitsunday, commemorates to-day its fulfilment. Indeed, the gift of the Holy Ghost to carry out the gracious purposes of Heaven in respect of men, is regarded by the Church as second only in importance to that of an acceptable propitiatory sacrifice for our sins. As without justification by the precious blood of Christ, we can have no

substantial peace with God ; so without the renewing of the Holy Ghost, we can have no filial enjoyment of God here, no qualification to enter upon our rest hereafter. The forgiveness of sins, however indispensable as an antecedent act of grace and mercy, is no substitute for the peculiar offices of the Holy Ghost. It is preparatory only in its nature, and subordinate to another and higher intervention of divine favor. It opens a pathway to our bosoms, and fits us for the reception of power from on high. In Scripture, therefore, we are represented as saved, "by the washing of regeneration," which is the grand absolution we require, and by the "renewing of the Holy Ghost."* Were we to listen to some excellent people, we might be led to suppose, that the sum of religion consisted in the forgiveness of our sins, or rather in some unaccountable impression of such forgiveness in our individual case. Such persons would seem to have forgotten that the forgiveness of sins is set forth in Scripture as moral and probationary only in its nature and intention. It may be ratified and confirmed or it may be disannulled, as we may improve or fail to improve the grace it comprehends. If it lead us devoutly and habitually to pray for the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit, to exercise ourselves in the power of the Spirit ; if it operate on our hearts as an incentive to holiness—why then, the forgiveness of our sins will most surely be ratified and confirmed. But if we disregard the nature and intention of this clemency ; lose sight of its proper influence on the temper and disposition of our own minds ; turn it into matter of vain confidence or of empty boast ; sit down contented in this conceit ; then the decision with

* Tit. iii. 5.

respect to us is already recorded. "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me : shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?"* We know what followed in the case of that improvident servant. Here we may perceive that there is a moral end to be served in the forgiveness of our sins, and to this end it is the office of the Holy Ghost to minister effectually. As the temper of our own minds may be rightly affected or not, under the comfortable sense of God's goodness towards us, so freely and so bountifully exhibited; so will the remission of our debts, as an antecedent act of God, be confirmed hereafter or revoked. This we believe to be Scripture doctrine, and it gives unspeakable importance to the peculiar offices of the Spirit. This blessed Spirit not only applies to our individual necessities, the benefits of Christ's mediatory sufferings and death, but carries out in all its bearings what was so happily begun. As He wrought within us penitent and believing affections, so He works within us a good will and disposition of mind, and arms our souls with an energy of obedience, which we cannot otherwise possess. What is affirmed of the Apostles in our text, is affirmable of Christians in every age. "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you." We may do well then on the present Festival of Whitsunday to consider this precious promise, first in a special application to the Apostles, then in a more general and extended way. The Apostles are presented in Scripture, in the twofold view of their public and private characters. First, as chosen witnesses, on whose

* Matt. xviii. 32.

testimony, sealed with their blood, the Church in all ages was to rely—and secondly, as Christian men with souls to be saved. So distinct are these points of view, that St. Paul deemed it within his own liabilities to approve himself as a public witness, and yet to fall short as a private Christian. “Lest having preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”* Whether as public men or private Christians, the Apostles needed, in an eminent degree, the power which it was the peculiar office of the Spirit to afford. As public men their testimony was adverse to the feelings, sentiments, hopes and expectations of the age in which it was publicly borne. It was necessary that they should combine in their own characters, qualities of singular worth. Among these we may enumerate meekness of spirit, in connection with the most exalted degrees of moral intrepidity; holy contempt of all mere personal considerations; calmness and self-possession in the midst of danger; respect for the constituted authorities under all their opposition, united with unfaltering fidelity to their own cause. What but power from on high could have adequately endowed these men for the trying circumstances in which they were placed. Accordingly, when Peter and John were arraigned before the Jewish Sanhedrim, and the moral power of that august assemblage was made to bear down upon these ignorant, unlearned men; the Evangelist informs us that “Peter was filled with the Holy Ghost.”† He received a power adequate to the occasion, and so acquitted himself both in the proprieties of spirit and behavior, as well as in the integrity and fearlessness of his testimony, as to excite the astonish-

* 1 Cor. ix. 27.

† Acts iv. 8.

ment of the Court. "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."

Again: As public witnesses of things which they had heard and seen, it was necessary that their testimony should be accompanied by sufficient proofs of their own veracity. Credulity on our part is no virtue. It was not to be expected that confident assertion made by the Apostles would be taken for proof. And yet what proof of their own truthfulness were these men competent to afford? However satisfied themselves of the truth and reality of those things which they had heard and seen, yet, without some extraordinary attestation, they must have found it difficult, if not impossible, to gain the credence of others. Here also the promise recorded in our text was fulfilled, in a sense peculiar to the Apostles. They wrought miracles in proof of the truths which they delivered. "God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will."*

Again: As public witnesses it was necessary that they should speak the languages of the nations to whom this testimony was to be borne. A genius for acquiring languages is not common to all men, and the want of it can be compensated only by a course of patient application. But it was necessary that the Apostles should forthwith address the nations represented at Jerusalem. Here again the promise in our text was realized. In the gift of tongues an effectual door was opened for the publication of the Gospel. The light and energy of divine truth were diffused among the people. Every man, in his own dialect,

* Heb. ii. 4.

had received a lesson which he was not likely to unlearn. "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." There are other instances of the fulfilment of this promise, in a sense peculiar to the Apostles, but in none is the power of the Holy Ghost more evident than in the constancy exhibited by these men under the most trying circumstances, even unto the end. Constancy is an indispensable qualification for a public witness. Men of timorous feelings, who can be awed in their moral frame and overborne in their testimony by considerations of personal account, were evidently not fit to occupy this responsible post. And yet, that men of themselves are insufficient for these things, is not only a truth which all good men acknowledge, and none but the bad deny; but one illustrated in the early history of the Apostles themselves. Under the merest apprehension of some personal inconvenience, Peter had denied his Lord, and on another occasion all the disciples had forsaken Him and fled. It would seem that these instances of weakness on their part were recorded, as though but to set in a stronger point of view the gracious temper of their minds and course of conduct when the promise in our text should be fulfilled. How admirably did not the Holy Ghost supply these natural defects in their moral constitution. Where is now their waywardness—their half-heartedness—their indecision—their flight? On the contrary, mark their constancy under the severest privations; their invincible patience under the indignities heaped upon them; see with what dignified composure they retired from the tribunals; torn outwardly, indeed, under the arbitrary inflictions of an impious misrule; but resplendent in every interior attribute,

and rejoicing in spirit, that in a cause so divine they were accounted worthy to suffer shame. "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." Now, we do not assert that these extraordinary endowments of the Spirit are in such wise peculiar to the Apostles, that, were they again required by circumstances, they would not again be afforded. "As thy day is, so shall thy strength be,"* is a recorded maxim; but this much we may confidently assert, that the circumstances of the Apostles as public witnesses, are not our circumstances; and, therefore, nothing but the vainest conceit or strangest delusion can determine men in the present day to claim or expect those extraordinary interpositions of the Spirit, which were appropriate only to the early times of the Christian Revelation.

But, because we may not be public witnesses in an extraordinary age and under extraordinary exigencies of the Church, it does not follow that, as Christian men with souls to be saved, we have no interest in our Lord's promise recorded in the text. In this latter sense, we have intimated, the Apostles themselves were deeply interested. Without the ordinary influence of the Spirit to order our unruly wills and affections, we are found as powerless to adorn our profession as, without the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, the Apostles would have been to fill their station as public witnesses. As Christian men, we need power from on high, and this power we can receive only under the beneficent operations of the Holy Ghost. In the first place, as ordinary Christians, we need to be lightened in our eyes, that we sleep not in death; we need

* Deut. xxxiii. 25.

to be quickened from time to time, and roused from a state of dire insensibility to our souls' welfare. It is recorded of the ten virgins, that they all slumbered and slept. What was the habitual state of the foolish, was the occasional state of the wise; and, beloved friends, is there one among ourselves who will claim an exemption from this dangerous liability? Look back over the line of your Christian course, and see what derelictions have not marred the beauty and propriety even of that short career. How often, amidst the glare of this world, has not your eye been closed on Heaven, and your soul shrouded, as it were, in some mysterious torpor, and yourself identified in feeling and affection, in spirit and habit of life, with the slumbering children of an evil generation. One expresses to me his apprehension of too much precipitancy on his part, in having assumed the yoke of Christ; another is harassed with distressing doubts on the question, whether he was ever the subject of true repentance or of faith unfeigned. The sense of contrast between what they are and what they should be, it would seem, has become painfully acute, and they with difficulty can be made to believe that the realities of their own case are within the ordinary lines of Christian experience. Say what power but that of the Holy Ghost can here effectually interpose in our behalf? Who besides the divine Spirit can convey the Word of Life to its proper destination in the soul? Who besides can awaken the slumbering soul and bid the dead come forth—unloose of its bands every expressive faculty of life and let the soul go free? And mark, when this office is performed, what important changes are not thereby effected. We speak not now of a sinner's conversion from darkness to light, and from the power of

Satan unto God; but of occasional revivals in the Christian's own breast. Contrast his wakeful with his slumbering state; see what a Christian is when under the power of the Holy Ghost, and what he is when shorn of this power. In the latter case, we see him cold, timorous, unfruitful, and in every attribute as one going down to the pit; in the former, we witness every indication of spiritual freshness and vitality. How does not this sacred energy unlock the heart, enkindle the affections, open the hands, confirm the feeble knees, and consecrate every practical power to God in a new and everlasting covenant. "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."

But it is while endeavoring to regulate the spirit and disposition of his mind and habits of his life, that the Christian is more especially made to realize his need of power from on high. It is the language of God Himself: "I will put my Spirit within thee, and cause thee to obey my statutes."* On this divine declaration the Apostle doubtless grounded this injunction: "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."† What is here said is addressed to Christian people, and it supposes a state of inglorious servitude to some vile domination, in which violence is done to all that is enlightened within their own breasts. The man in such case is made to gratify tempers, to stir up contentions, to perpetuate animosities, as though he were under the control of some indomitable power, which, however threatening in its aspect, and destructive of his own peace, and defiling in its influence on the dearest objects around him, he has neither the inclination nor the power to withstand. In like manner

* Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

† Gal. v. 16.

he may be drawn away from his pathway proper, and enticed by divers lusts; the gratification of which, nevertheless, he knows can only serve to debase his nature; to war against his own soul; to pierce his own heart through with many sorrows; if not to drown the whole man in the final perdition of the ungodly. Neither the reproaches of some, nor the counsel of others, nor the convictions of his own head, nor the misgivings of his own heart, seem to avail him aught; the habit of his life is against a universal protest from within and from without, and—though outwardly, and by profession at least, a servant of the Redeemer—he is represented in Scripture as treasuring up to himself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* But where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Let but the Holy Ghost come on such an individual, and presently he has received power. The wind bloweth where it listeth, but how or in what way he cannot tell. Certain it is, that a redeeming energy has come upon him; the great work is revived within him; the arm of the Lord has been revealed. In the midst of wrath mercy has broken forth refulgent. One thing he knows, that his feet have been taken from out a horrible pit, out of the mire and clay, and have been set on a rock, while the incense of a new song out of a grateful heart has full well recognized the source of so happy a deliverance. “But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.”

The last instance in which we shall notice the ordinary fulfilment of this promise is in the comforts essential to our support, and of which the Holy Spirit is

* Rom. ii. 4.

the author and source. As public witnesses, the Apostles were comforted with extraordinary gifts, while, as Christian men, they were sustained under the ordinary influences of the Spirit, and through those ordinary means common to ourselves. "Death worketh in us,"* says an Apostle; "We are troubled on every side,"† "perplexed," "persecuted," "cast down:" while under these things they were not insensible to the workings of death within their own souls, which, if heeded for a moment, must soon have issued in the weariness and faintness of their own minds. How dangerous in this respect are not our liabilities! We tremble for the Christian as he sickens at heart under the unavoidable difficulties and perplexities of his holy calling. We know the device of Satan, and the facility with which discouragements in spiritual things are made to minister to sentiments of hopeless gloom. Our trust, as Christians, is not in an arm of flesh to sustain the arduous conflict in behalf of our souls' salvation; but in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, in those real yet hidden supports, which through various channels he conveys to the human mind. He it is who overthrows the policy of Satan, dissipates the gloom of death in the soul, renews the strength of the weary, brightens their prospects, cheers their hearts, and encourages every heavenward aspiration.

Finally, the subject is not without lessons of practical wisdom. We shall here find a suggestion under all our conflicts with corruption. Defeat, under its varied forms, should serve but to teach us the insufficiency of our own best directed efforts and the necessity, in our case, of having recourse to the Divine pro-

* 2 Cor. iv. 12.

† iv. 8.

vision indicated in our text. We shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon us. Let us not therefore give place to hard thoughts of our Heavenly Parent, as though at any time he had left or forsaken us; but rather derive from our difficulties and defeats abiding impressions of our own weakness, as well as of the enduring ground on which our hopes are made to rely. Let us daily invoke the power of the Holy Ghost to create within us what we need, and to renew within us whatsoever has been decayed by the fraud and malice of the devil. "Surely in the Lord only have we righteousness and strength."* The same suggestion will apply when we feel ourselves to be oppressed under the troubles and adversities of life, and also under any of those inscrutable Providences of Almighty God in which we walk in darkness and have no light. In the Holy Ghost have we a rock of comfort which shall not be removed. In due time we shall reap all things of life and godliness, if we faint not. O, then, let us patiently abide the Lord and stay our souls upon God. Let us banish from our breasts every sentiment and feeling of distrust. Let us appreciate the Divine promise in our text, on which we are taught to depend, while we search and try our ways and turn unto the Lord. By every inward sentiment and outward expression of humility let us invite the Holy Spirit to our own bosoms, and cherish its precious fruits in our spirit, affection, and habit of life; for we shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon us.

* Is. xlv. 24.

SERMON XV.

Good Friday.

CHRISTIAN PECULIARITY.

“Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”—Titus ii. 14.

WE are called on this morning, as a portion of the Universal Church, to commemorate in an especial manner the crucifixion of our Lord and Master as the Lamb of God, the great propitiatory sacrifice for our sins. This atonement offering, through the infinite merit of which God is reconciled to sinners and now particularly awaits their reconciliation with Himself, through the same ever-enduring medium, is that grand feature of the mystery of godliness which inspiration indeed defines, but never attempts to explain. The atonement offering, as we all believe, is full in itself, perfect in its adaptations, and sufficient for its end. Nothing, without presumption, can be added thereto; nothing, without sacrilege, can be taken therefrom. This will be clearly perceived, when we consider that the great sacrifice we commemorate, is an offering provided by God Himself, and therefore precious—appointed by God Himself, and therefore acceptable. His well-beloved Son is at once the eternal Priest and the all-available Victim for the sins of the whole world. If it be asked in what manner this sacrifice purchased our redemption, we answer, We know not. Many points relative to this great mystery are to us of an scrutible nature. It is sufficient for us that God know-

eth. But if the end and design of this holy mystery be inquired into, and these in their application to ourselves, then the text will meet the inquiry with all needful accuracy and precision; "Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." This knowledge we needed, this we have. The doctrinal truth involved in these words may thus be stated: That the eternal Son of God, the second person of the adorable Trinity—not less by authority of the Holy Father, as elsewhere is affirmed, than of His own will and with the deepest interest in the work—gave himself an offering and a sacrifice to God propitiatory in our behalf; an offering which began actually with the mystery of his holy Incarnation, and which was finished on the Cross: that the design of this vicarious sacrifice in relation to the Holy Father, was to reconcile His essential attributes with the justification of sinners; while in relation to ourselves, it was to redeem us from the condemnation of the Law, from the dominion of Satan, and inward pollution, and make us a people peculiarly His own.

Concerning the nature and comprehension of this redemption, we are all instructed. In its nature, it is eminently gracious, originating neither in divine obligation, nor man's desert. In its comprehension, it proposes not merely to redeem us from sin and eternal death, but to fit us for Heaven, and to bring us there to be for ever with our Lord and Master, as joint heirs of His glory both in body and soul; but what is comprehended in the Christian peculiarity referred to in our text, is on the first view, not so obvious. On this, therefore, we purpose to discourse. We read in our text of a peculiar people unto Christ. The descriptive

term certainly means this much: that whatever the true servant of Christ may hold in common with others, he holds something distinctive; something proper to himself as the servant of Christ; something which, in the sight of his Lord, impresses character.

In the first place, it is not mere religion which constitutes the Christian peculiarity. To be religious merely, is one thing; to be Christian, implies something more. The distinction is marked by St. Peter. "In every nation," says the Apostle, "he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him;"* which shows that the merit of the great sacrifice we commemorate, is not limited by the revelation or knowledge of it. Every where and in all ages, there will be found a reverential disposition of mind, an honesty and goodness of heart, to which the blood of atonement will be available with God for its acceptance. God knows His sheep, however scattered abroad, and ere they have been called into the fold by the Gospel. But it by no means follows, that the devout Heathen to whom the Apostle referred were, under purification of the Spirit, a peculiar people unto Christ. Not but that the true servant of Christ, as such, feareth God and worketh righteousness; but religion, we say, is not the Christian peculiarity. The Christian holds religion in common with devout men of every nation under Heaven, and even this in a higher and more concentrated degree; but then his peculiarity, as a Christian, involves a qualification to which no mere religious man, as such, has ever attained. This distinction is of the more importance to be marked, because nothing is more common than to find men,

* Acts x. 35.

even in Christian communities, who confound the two ideas, and content themselves with a certain aspect of religion, in which they have been equalled, if not greatly surpassed, by many a devout Heathen. How few, even among Christian people, may have surpassed Cornelius in his religious retirements, his prayers and his alms, which had gone up as a memorial before God. Some of the class referred to, when under stringent applications of divine truth, find their solace in some work of righteousness which they have wrought. So also some, in their last moments, repose on some one religious determination of mind or single act of life; perhaps on a bequest to some popular charity. Others allay some kindling apprehension, with the reflection on the negative character of their lives. They can say, I have wronged no man, I have defrauded no man. Others rely on the consideration of a life deformed by no outbreak of profligacy or licentiousness; but rather adorned with the practice of many commendable, though easy virtues. Now, we are certainly not disposed in the least to disparage these aspects of religion in the place which Scripture has assigned them. On the contrary, we cheerfully concede to their subjects all which they can reasonably demand. We freely admit, that with reputation among men for honesty and goodness of heart, industry, care of their families, and a general conscientiousness, they have combined much of inward reverence for Almighty God. But it were scarcely to be imagined, that what is affirmed of the Son of God in our text, as having given Himself, the awful price of our redemption, should have contemplated no higher achievement in our behalf than the improvement of our citizenship, of which many a devout Jew, and Turk, and Heathen, has furnished illus-

trious examples. The Christian peculiarity covers all this ground, but it covers more; and, we may add, much more than the mere religious man can hope to attain unto.

Again: It is not mere educational Christianity which constitutes the peculiarity referred to in our text. The most that can rightly be conceded to such favored persons is the merit—if merit it be—of not having obstinately resisted the strong natural tendencies of early culture, but rather of having passively admitted into their minds, under an authority which they were taught to honor, certain doctrinal theories and sentiments which in their case happen to be Christian, as in other instances they happen to be Jewish, in others Mohammedan, in others Heathen—just as, in either case, the subject has passively received the mother tongue, or passively come in possession of the peculiar sympathies and taste, manners and address, of those around him. Now this early training, when truly Christian and rightly regarded, is not without its solid advantages. To say nothing of many positive evils which are thereby averted, it has always proved a valuable auxiliary of the Christian peculiarity where this exists. Educational Christianity is to the Christian peculiarity what a liberal education is to some professional pursuit. It is a valuable subaltern, but a worthless chief. It is something which, however indeterminate in itself, is useful to a result, but which, when misconceived for the result itself, becomes wholly ineffective, if not injurious. One of the most useless classes of men, as seen and felt to be every where and in all ages, is that composed of individuals who, with a liberal education, have combined a vague and aimless course of life. It were well had their sharpened intel-

lects remained merely idle ; but it will be a mercy if the vigilant adversary of their souls enlist them not as effective auxiliaries in the service of his own kingdom. It is just so in the case before us. Educational Christianity, if not diligently applied under the Spirit to its appropriate end, will in all probability be misapplied, and but too adversely, to the soul. What spectacle within the religious world can be more displeasing to God, or melancholy in itself, than that of persons so highly favored, yet so radically ingrate, who profess to know the Lord, but who glorify Him not as Lord—persons who, while they admit the premises in our text, deny the inspired conclusion—who live unto themselves, in the face of the divine record that the Son of God gave Himself for them—who, so far from illustrating the Christian peculiarity in the spirit and meaning of a living sacrifice holy and acceptable unto God, surrender to a domination of the false and impious principle implied in self-proprietorship, self-love, self-will, self-power, self-appropriation, and self-control ?

Under these circumstances, what has Christian education become to its favored subject but as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal ? He is nothing in God's account but an aggravated form of unholy existence ; and so far from being profited himself, has but fallen thereby into greater condemnation. We have dwelt the more largely on this head, because we know there are persons, and have but too melancholy evidence that they abound within the Church, who underrate, or might with reason be supposed to underrate, the discipline involved in the religious training of the young. How these young persons, within the scope of self-love allowed them, are to be purified unto Christ, a peculiar people, we have no means on which to form

a judgment. Neither His cross within, nor His yoke without, is at all apparent. They will probably rest on what they have passively received, until the shame of their nakedness appear. To bring up children in the way of self-crucifixion, is to bring them up in the way they should go. On this their true discipleship must depend. Herein will the Christian peculiarity be developed. In all subsidiary means employed, the conquest of the cross over the inherent principle of self-proprietorship, is the result to be aimed for, labored in, and prayed for. Every step in religion antecedently to this result is but indeterminate, unsatisfactory, and inconclusive. And why should any wonder at this economy, when we are so clearly taught in our text, that, whatever may be affirmed of our Lord's humiliation in our behalf—His sufferings and death—yet in their application to ourselves they become of inestimable value only as leading to a result? He gave Himself for us for a special end, and unless this end be attained in the establishment of His righteous ownership in us and over us, the free gift will have profited us nothing. In this view the text becomes monitory to those who, however they may recognize in Christ a propitiatory sacrifice for their sins, yet virtually repudiate His ownership in the habitual domination of their own self-love. "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"* "Who gave Himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."

Again: It is not mere sacramental Christianity which constitutes the Christian peculiarity. By sacra-

* Luke vi. 46.

mental Christianity we mean the recognition and reception by ourselves of those holy mysteries which Christ himself instituted and ordained—Baptism and the Lord's Supper. That these holy mysteries have a place assigned them in the ordinary process of salvation, no well-instructed scribe would be disposed to deny; still, on the ground of Scripture, we must admit that the mere outward reception of these holy mysteries is not to be confounded with the Christian peculiarity referred to in our text. This peculiarity, indeed, covers the Sacramental ground; but it covers more, and much more, than the mere formal partaker of Sacraments has ever attained. How conclusively does not the Apostle reason with the Corinthians on this very point! He warns them by the record of those who were displeasing to God and ultimately overthrown in the wilderness, who nevertheless were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and did all eat with God's peculiar people the same spiritual meat, and did all partake of the same spiritual drink—"for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."* They lived in the habitual neglect, if not contempt, of the inner peculiarity of their dispensation.

Now, God, even in that day, was not without a peculiar people whom He had purified unto Himself; a people who, in their great deliverance from the Egyptian captivity, relinquished for ever their self-proprietorship, recognized in God their rightful owner, were zealous for God, hearkened unto His voice, and obeyed His word, and were unto God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable; but there were those among them who

* I. Cor. x. 4.

ate with them, indeed, of the heavenly food and drank with them of the mystical Rock, but who were not like-minded, but rather, as it is said of another spirit, self-owners, "Lovers of their own selves."* So likewise in the parable of the ten virgins, there was much, indeed, which they held in common; but five of them were a peculiar people unto the bridegroom, whom they professed to serve and to honor; and their peculiarity, we may perceive, consisted in the whole-heartedness of their devotion to his honor. This commendable spirit suggested the providing themselves with a secret store of oil—a measure beyond the common and temporary provision on which others relied. Be assured whole-heartedness to Him who died for us is the result of a divine purification of the spirit of our minds from self-ownership, with all its motley progeny of self-will, self-love, self-vindication, and self-control. This alone is that available qualification for service, under circumstances and at a time when all the ordinary provision with which so many content their souls, has failed. Neither is ceremonial religion to be confounded with the Christian peculiarity referred to in our text. It might seem superfluous to assert this after what has been said, and we should deem it to be so were it not for the impetuous zeal which ceremonial religion has often kindled and is again kindling within the Church; but our text is sufficiently clear on the point, as to the proper object on which the zeal of Christ's peculiar people has ever expended itself. This object is not the mere ceremonial which, however and within prescribed limitations the Church hath power to decree, she cannot enforce as of necessity for salvation. True Chris-

* 2 Tim. iii. 2.

tian zeal, as declared in our text, has for its legitimate object good works, whether actively or passively considered—such works as proceed of faith in Him who gave himself for us; works worthy of those who, in the believing contemplation of what God hath done and of what Christ hath suffered in our redemption, have presented themselves whole and entire as a living holocaust unto God. The question, then, naturally arises—What is implied in the Christian peculiarity? Intimations of this have been dropped in the negative views we have taken; we may now clearly answer, The Christian peculiarity springs by easy consequence from those progressive operations of the Spirit within the soul, under which the heart is liberated from the bond of self-love and all other adverse bonds, which hitherto may have restrained a full and practical acknowledgment of Christ, as our rightful owner, or of ourselves as the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand, or of our practical powers, or of our faculties of mind and heart, as so many instruments of righteousness unto God our Saviour.

This peculiarity was affirmed of Caleb, when honored of God with the title of “*His servant*,”* because “he has another spirit with him and hath followed me fully.” It is added, “him will I bring into the land.” It has characterized the true Israel of God in all ages, when they counted not their own lives dear unto themselves in prosecuting God’s work and in fulfilling his will. It is the recorded mark of a living Church. “But thou, Israel, art my servant; fear not.”† It is affirmed of the great Head of the Church, whose crucifixion we commemorate—“Behold my servant whom

* Num. xiv. 24.

† Is. xli. 8, 10.

I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth.”* All these, and many such scriptures, show that the radical distinction implied in the Christian peculiarity is not hidden from God under general conformations. “The Lord knoweth them that are his;”† he knoweth his peculiar people whom his grace hath redeemed from all iniquity and purified into this whole-heartedness or devotedness to himself. He knoweth them in the root and in the branch, in the bud and in the bloom, in the precious fruits of righteousness or of patient endurance, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God. Now, although a reference to that mind which was in Christ Jesus is by far the easier, the safer, the more accurate, the more intelligible way of defining and illustrating the Christian peculiarity (for he hath left us an example, that we should follow his steps), yet the Apostles have employed many expressions and turns of thought which illuminate this peculiarity and make it plain to the humblest capacity. Mark such passages as these: “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.”‡ The old lover of his own self has, under the renovation of the Spirit, been transformed into a second Caleb; has another spirit, and follows his master whithersoever he goeth. And this is no fitful determination which dureth but for a while and then relapses into the former state, for, mark this scripture: “The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”§ The new creature, it would thus seem, has a root in himself, though not of himself: it is a principle of faith working by love, deriving its duration, force, and effectiveness from the power of the

* Is. xli. 1.

† 2 Tim. ii. 19.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 17.

§ Gal. ii. 20.

Cross. We all know that grateful affection is the most powerful incentive to activity of which a right mind is susceptible. The peculiarity in the Christian's case is, that his Lord and Master is the supreme object of it, and those for whom he died. It would thus seem that faith, working by love and regulating both the mind within and the conduct without, is that grand operative principle which, under the Spirit, purifies unto Christ a peculiar people. Now mark the adornments of these people from the same source and under the same operation. "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness,"* the cementing grace of Christ's peculiar people, which as a finishing grace gives an attractive blush to every other that is lovely. Hear also what our Lord Jesus Christ saith: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me;"† which shows that the essential properties of that mind which was in Christ Jesus must often find within our nature a powerful antagonism, which, nevertheless, as Christ's peculiar people, we keep under and bring into subjection, mortifying thereby the old nature, and affording to the new every facility to growth and development.

Now show me a man thus rooted, thus adorned, and thus minded, and I will show you a peculiar man unto Christ through purification of the Spirit. This man will be of another spirit from the great body of those

* Col. iii. 12-14.

† Matt. xvi. 24.

with whom he is associated, and with whatever infirmity his course may be marked, will follow his Master fully. Beloved friends, the topic is awakening. "What do ye more than others?" said our Lord.* Wherein is our superiority to the devout Heathen, who fear God and work righteousness? Wherein do we exceed the righteousness of those who have passively received with their mother tongue the Christianity on which they repose? Surely our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of each and every form of half-heartedness in the service of a crucified Lord, would we rightly appropriate to ourselves the hopes, the widening prospects, the peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, which pertain to those only whom Christ hath redeemed by his precious blood, and by the operations of the Spirit purified unto himself as a peculiar people. "Surely the Kingdom of God is not in word but in power."† It stands in palpable demonstrations. Look at the spectacle we contemplate to-day; see how the love of God towards ourselves is manifested. There is no half-heartedness in the gift of the only begotten of the Father, none in the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion of that expiatory victim. It must be so with ourselves. We must turn from the delusive persuasions under which our hearts have been long deceived, and betake ourselves to solid proofs. It is the work visible only which proves the work invisible, and removes from the breast all distracting doubts and uncertainties. The world spiritual is deluged with spurious emissions from the Evil One. Every department of the spiritual life has its counterfeit; and he who would escape delusion must try the spirits by tests

* Matt. v. 47.

† 1 Cor. iv. 20,

which, from their very nature, admit neither of fraud nor prevarication. We must be zealous for good works as the only reliable evidence of which the nature of the case admits. Our repentance must be evidenced by visible forms which we can handle with our hands; so must our faith, so must our love. All the Christian graces admit of embodiments in kind, and under circumstances, which defy the craft and subtlety of the devil. In these visible forms only the Lord Jesus recognizes, acknowledges, and accepts the whole-heartedness of those whom he has purified unto himself. His promises are addressed to his peculiar people; they follow him fully; they now participate in his works, and in his patient endurance, and shall hereafter participate in his exaltation and glory at the right hand of God.



SERMON XVI.

THE THIEVES ON THE CROSS NOT BOTH SAVED.

“Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.”—St. Matt. xxvii. 38.

SEVERAL incidents recorded in Scripture, as well as parables spoken by our Lord, strongly tend to show the different effects on the minds of men of God’s judicial visitations. Our mortal nature indeed, in every instance, is the same. All are born of the flesh, and while in the flesh cannot please God, but rather live in sin, committing many actual transgressions. All are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ—all, through the mission of the promised Spirit, are convinced o

sin, of a righteous God, and of a judgment to come—all are called by the glorious Gospel to repentance, to faith, to eternal life. To all the means of grace are supplied: all, in a very important sense, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. In addition to these circumstances which mark our common state, we find a general agreement in some other aspects of that state. We have been all born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upwards. What painful visitations have not fallen within our experience!—under what acute miseries have not our bosoms writhed!—what afflictive bereavements have not ministered to our rebuke! . If we regard the scene presented in our text, we shall discover two men brought together under the judicial displeasure of Almighty God, as alike in suffering as they were alike in transgression—as alike in sin as they were alike in proximity to a Saviour. Yet we may perceive in their case that deep, broad, radical line of distinction which, amidst all points of resemblance, severs men into two classes—the one penitent, the other impenitent; the one humble and believing, the other proud and infidel; the one openly confessing his Redeemer, and acknowledging the justice of his sentence, the other neglecting that great salvation which, in the mercy of Heaven, had been put within his reach; the one breathing out his soul under the blessed hope of everlasting life which God had given him in the expiatory sacrifice set before him, the other dying in his sins, receiving from the atoning sacrifice before his eyes a horrible aggravation of his guilt and ruin.

The scene in our text is impressive; and were it a solitary instance of the wisdom of one sinner, and of the improvidence of another, we might leave it here as one of those historical narratives into which curiosity

indeed might prompt us to look, but in which we ourselves possessed little or no personal interest. But is it so? Does the narrative within our text stop within itself? Did the Spirit of God consult our curiosity alone, when it indited a statement of the fact, that two sinners expired in equal closeness to our Lord's suffering body—the one on his right hand, the other on his left, and yet as wide apart from each other in their eternal allotments as are Heaven and Hell? Certainly not. If there be one Scripture narrative more than another written for our admonition, that narrative is before us. What is more, it, in substance, is rehearsed among us from time to time. It is exhibited to our view whenever the Holy Sacrament is administered. This very morning we shall see among ourselves all the essential features of circumstance it comprehended. When the Apostle refers to the administration of the Holy Communion, he employs this remarkable language: "Before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you."* If from the memorial of this event before us the Church has been commanded to make, we turn to this assembly, the two classes indicated by the two sufferers are not less evident. We behold within these walls a multitude of dying sinners—of sinners allied to each other on many points of sad and humiliating resemblance—alike in sin and alike in suffering—alike in condemnation under the law, and alike hastening to their dissolution—in equal nearness to the Sacramental Body and Blood of Christ, and under equal need of the merit of his all propitiatory sacrifice; yet differing from each other on the one grand point upon which eternal destinies are suspended. The

* Gal. iii. 1.

one penitent, the other impenitent; the one receiving, the other rejecting the Lord of Life; the one choosing, the other refusing the propitiatory sacrifice for their sins; the one comforted and cheered with the full assurance of hope, and awaiting in faith and patience the manifestation of Paradise, the other daily breathing out their souls amidst the most appalling uncertainties in respect of that issue which death, judgment, and eternity must inevitably unfold.

Such being the congruity between the circumstances of the two sinners referred to in our text and our own, we can scarcely make a wiser improvement of the narrative than to appropriate to our own use some of the invaluable suggestions it affords. In the first place, we see illustrated in these two sinners our common state. Alas! all we, like sheep, have gone astray—all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. There is none righteous: no not one. Nothing is more common among persons under the dominion of self-love, than to compare themselves among themselves. Some thank God that they are not as other men are. But the Scriptures proceed by another rule. They compare men in their thoughts, words, and deeds, not with each other, but with the requisitions of that perfect law under which they have received their being; and hence they unerringly conclude all under sin. Nor is this conclusion arbitrary. For whatever difference may exist among men in the development of sin, yet the essential principle of depravity is inherent in the nature of every man, and may be early there discovered by himself to be lively and active in its motions. When the Apostle, to the Galatians, refers to this economy under which all are concluded under sin, irrespective of any development, so that not even they who have

not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression are exempted—that is, little children, he assigns the reason of the rule—"that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."* True faith, in its operation, brings to the soul humility, unfeigned repentance, sanctification, and eternal life; it works for a sinner what the Law, in its application to his fallen nature, could not do. The Law can work for a sinner but condemnation and death. In this point of view, we can perceive no difference in the two cases before us. Both had violated the Law—both were condemned by the Law—both were now set forth as dying sinners, suffering under the penalty of their sins, and just entering the dark shadows of eternal death. And wherein do we ourselves differ, on any essential point of the tragic scene here displayed? Is there one among us who, in thought, word, and deed, has not provoked the Divine Majesty, and defied its power? Is there one among us so blinded by self-love, or hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, as to claim for himself a righteousness acceptable to a pure and holy God, through the deeds of the law? Sin, indeed, in the case of some among us, may not have been outwardly marked as strongly as in the case of others; but let us remember that the sentence of the Divine Law does not wait for the development of sin. As the nature of a plant is as perfect in the seed as it is in any after-growth of which that seed is capable; so in the holy vision of Almighty God, and in the requisition of that Law under which we were created, rank and character are taken from the very rudiments of evil. Of but little avail will it prove in the claim of any man

* Gal. iii. 22.

to justification by the deeds of the Law, that he had here sustained reputation with his fellow-men—had conciliated their respect and esteem—had been numbered with worthy members of society, while, in the essence of his moral being, he had lived in despite of the Spirit, in rebellion against God, in the neglect of salvation, conceding to Divine Government that homage only which best tended to advance or secure his worldly ends. No, a more accurate, a more just conclusion is drawn by inspiration: “By the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified.”* For “the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” There is a Divine promise that sanctification shall be wrought in the believing sinner, by the renewing of the Holy Ghost. There is a Divine promise of pardon to that sinner, of eternal life; and these gracious promises will most assuredly be realized by every humble believer.

Another suggestion from the scene before us, is the proximity to Christ, into which all sinners have been brought. Some are on His right hand, some are on His left. All are sufficiently nigh to receive from Him the sense and knowledge of duty; the hopes and fears, the helps and directions, which the Gospel affords. No man, indeed, in and of himself, is competent to subdue the impenitency and unbelief of his own untoward nature. Neither will the power to destroy these deep-seated works of the devil be arbitrarily conferred upon any. Neither is it possible to define the limits between Divine influence and human co-operation in the destruction of these works. That God works effectually by

* Rom. iii. 20.

His grace on the will and capabilities of the sinner is certain. That the believing sinner works with God in effecting his own salvation, is a truth not less plainly declared. But it is of no more importance to define the limits of Divine influence and of human co-operation in the field spiritual, than in the field natural. As the benign radiance of the sun, with the kindly influence of the former and latter rain, unite and blend with human toil in advancing and maturing the precious fruits, so it is as graciously appointed that sinners, with reverential and self-distrusting sentiments, shall work out their own salvation under the prevailing motive, that an omnipotent Saviour is their most gracious friend and ally. Certain it is, that we are all in equal proximity to our adorable Redeemer. Sinners, indeed, we all are. Suffering, indeed, we all are. Dying, indeed, we all are. Each moment of time, as it passes by, narrows the space which intervenes between our spirits and their eternal destinies; but there is not a soul present for whom Christ has not tasted death. Not a soul to whom the Gospel has not been preached. Not a soul who has been left without the knowledge and sense of duty. If we look to the two persons in the narrative, we shall be at a loss to conceive, why the one should not have exhibited the prevailing disposition of the other. Alike in sin, alike under condemnation, alike in suffering, alike hastening to the tomb, alike in nearness to a Saviour, it might surely have been expected that both, with one heart and with one mind, would have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them. And is not this expectation as reasonable in reference to ourselves? Wherein do we differ from each other in all that should move the soul to repentance, and faith, and lowly obedience? What

motive can possibly exist in one case, which does not equally apply to all? What difficulty in the way of life can be suggested, which is not of universal application? Has ever a sinner reached his eternal rest, who has not encountered all that lies before ourselves, and who has not overcome by the blood of the Lamb? O what seas have not been divided! what dark depths have not been passed! what daily supplies of bread have not the heavens afforded! what refreshing waters have not gushed from the rock! how has not the breast of the poor feeble pilgrim swollen under sentiments of wonder, praise, and love, as, in retrospective view, he has surveyed the arm omnipotent which had been raised in his behalf? Yes, be assured, we are all touching the Saviour's body on the Cross. The same motives to repentance which prevail with some, are exhibited to all. All have heard the voice from Heaven combining glory to God in the highest with good-will to men. To all, the Spirit has been given. To all, His convincings have come. To all, the one Name has been given under Heaven, whereby only we may be saved.

But another suggestion from the scene before us, reveals the startling fact, that notwithstanding this identity in points of circumstance, a broad line of demarcation runs through this congregation, and will significantly be retraced to-day. If we look into our narrative, we shall scarcely fail to discover this same mysterious line, which, in the face of all points of resemblance in the two cases, separated one from the other, though not yet deepened into an impassable gulf. While the one afforded all the indications of a broken and contrite heart, the other was self-justified and self-sustained. While the one vindicated the inno-

cence of his Saviour and acknowledged his own demerit—the other united with the multitude in reproach and blasphemy. While the one mortified the pride of his impenitence, and yielded his heart and mind to the guidance of the Spirit which God had given him; the other, in resistance to the Spirit, braced his impenitence, hazarding every moment the awful issue of eternal death.

And is there nothing in our own circumstances closely allied to this feature in the man before us? Have we no visible indications of some mysterious line of demarcation which runs through the congregation, dividing sinners who on all other points of circumstance are so closely connected? Are not the different effects of God's judicial visitations among us seen and felt by every reflecting mind? Are they not as obvious within these walls as they were in the spectacle before us? Do all confess Christ in his humiliation? Will all draw nigh to-day and take this holy sacrament to their comfort, with the sentiments and feelings of true repentance, and of faith unfeigned, and of charity out of a pure heart? On the contrary, are there not some who, in whatever proximity to Christ, are infinitely apart from him in the spirit of their minds, and in the temper, and disposition, and affection of their souls; who, if they follow him at all, follow at such an appalling distance that they seem on purpose to have clouded their discipleship with a worldly veil? We would not be understood, indeed, to intimate that there are any present who are so far allied to one of the two cases before us as to respond to his sentiments of blasphemous reproach. But a modification of his impiety may, with but too much truth, be affirmed of those whose recognition of Christ scarcely exceeds the

natural effect of their education; who, if they must live close by a crucified Redeemer, are determined to live at as little expense as possible to the pride, and impenitence, and unbelief, and worldliness which predominate within them. Hence the last suggestion from the scene before us we shall notice is the startling truth, that some—and after all that God has done, and after all that Christ has suffered, and in the face of all those motives to repentance which the Gospel has furnished, and in the nearest proximity to Christ, and his Church, and his word, and his sacraments, and his ministry—will nevertheless be profited nothing, will die in their sins, will turn all these mercies of Heaven into a heavier mill-stone of eternal ruin. How terrible is this consideration! Look into the narrative before us. Contemplate a sinner dying at the side of the Redeemer, under the gush of his blood, within sound of those gracious promises made to the penitent believer, hearing the confession of his fellow-sinner, hearing his prayer to be remembered, hearing the gracious assurance of acceptance given him, and yet—and yet—expending breath after breath, until presently his existence is closed under the influence of that hardness and impeniteney of heart in which he had lived. And is there one sinner here who, in view of what has transpired on the Cross, will not tremble at his own exposure? Will you, my impenitent friend—will you contemplate a fellow-being perishing in his sins, at his Saviour's side, and within reach of His blood, and yet take no effectual warning, receive no effectual wisdom, be quickened to no decision of religious purpose, but live on until you be left at last to breathe out your soul in the secret agonies of unexpiated guilt? O be wise seasonably. Let the judicial visitations of Almighty God, which we

see from time to time, work in us their intended effect. Let them seriously incline our hearts to penitence, and faith, and renewed obedience. Let us seize upon present opportunity, and humbly and reverently aim to make our peace with God, through the blood of atonement, before we go hence and are no more seen. .



SERMON XVII.

THE CRY OF BLIND BARTIMEUS.

“And many charged him that he should hold his peace; but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.”—Mark x. 48.

No prophecy of the Scripture, St. Peter tells us, “is of any private interpretation.”* By which we may understand that a fact, when recorded in Scripture, does not end in the private parties of whom it is related, but is made the property of the Church to the end of time, and may be profitably used by the Church for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. In this point of view, the Scripture narratives, however simple in their structure and seemingly private in their application, become exceedingly interesting. The narrative of which our text is a part, is of this affecting and instructive character. Our Lord, on his way to Jerusalem, had passed through Jericho. Scarcely had he cleared the suburbs of that city, when his ears are saluted by a very direct and

* 2 Pet. i. 20.

earnest appeal for mercy. It proceeded from blind Bartimeus, who sat by the way-side, needing but little here below, and depending for that little on the providence of Him who feeds the young ravens when they cry. The fame of Jesus had reached his ear; and as the faculty of hearing is the ordinary, though by no means the exclusive medium through which God operates faith in the heart, so by hearing of His mighty works, this blind man had believed in Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah. "Blessed are they," said our Lord, "that have not seen, and yet have believed."* That is the most excellent faith, the most spiritual in itself and acceptable to our Redeemer, which is produced in the heart by the Spirit of God, and through the medium of that inspired Testimony on which the world at large, to the end of time, has mainly to rely. Under the influence of this kind of faith, blind Bartimeus began to cry out, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." With a deep sense of his own necessity, he combined a lively faith in our Lord's ability and willingness to minister to his relief. The mind of this man was evidently in a lowly frame. He improved the first, and perhaps the only opportunity ever afforded him, to make the acquaintance of his Redeemer. It was an opportunity passing by him, and he was earnestly desirous to seize upon it as it passed, and to turn it to good account. His appeal to our Lord was direct and publicly made. He was not ashamed to avow his faith; neither did he allow his faith to be overborne by adverse circumstances. His case illustrates the wisdom of adding to our faith virtue, that is, Christian fortitude, which is that gracious habit

* John xx. 29.

of mind under which faith survives and even flourishes under all its occasions of discouragement. Without virtue to endure trial, what other result can await our faith than to sink under the opposition of an ungodly world?

Mark the spirit of mind evinced by the subject of our narrative. Scarcely does his appeal for mercy assume the seriousness, the earnestness, the importunity which the humility of faith always inspires, when he is attempted to be put down by the multitude around him. They were willing that he should manifest that kind of deference and respect for religion, as it is termed, which did not reflect on their own heartlessness and indecision; but no sooner do the reality and earnestness of his faith appear in a direct and personal application to Christ, than he meets with their very peremptory rebuke. "Many charged him that he should hold his peace." But the blind man, suitably affected by the misery of his own condition, and impressed with the importance of improving a transient opportunity which the providence of God had afforded him, gathered from the rebuke only an additional motive to increased earnestness. Our text informs us, he cried the more, a great deal, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." This section of the narrative, then, suggests a few points on which it may be profitable to discourse. First: that obstacles in our way to Heaven, and many occasions of discouragement proceeding from persons and things around us may certainly be expected. But, Secondly: it is our privilege to make a wise use of these things, in the great work of salvation. By these hindrances we mean that, whatever it may be, which in its nature and tendencies either keeps men back from a serious public profession of their faith, or would after-

ward turn them aside from their way to Heaven. Were all to whom the Gospel is truly preached, obedient to the extent of their knowledge; were they true men, answerable in their outward course to their inward perceptions and feelings, it is highly probable the number of professing Christians would be greatly enlarged. We can entertain no doubt for a moment, that there are some among ourselves, who are restrained in their open and avowed application to Christ and the ordinances of His own appointment, not so much from any insensibility to their need of a Saviour, or want of faith or of kindly dispositions of mind, as through deficiency in manly virtue. They do not add to their faith this virtue. The former is overborne by certain obstacles in their way, either real or imaginary, and which they hastily conclude to be insuperable, at least for the present time. They are conscious of certain inward restraints, which the world around them has imposed, and they yield their judgment and conscience to these restraints. They seem to be charged by many that they should hold their peace, even before their cry for mercy has been seriously and distinctly raised, much less before it has assumed, in the Christian profession, its standing substance and form. This charge, moreover, from the world around, is conveyed to their minds in a form so subtle and intangible, as makes it difficult to be defined; so indirectly too, as not to offend their pride or provoke their resistance, and yet so effectually as to make them virtual slaves. They profess, indeed, with certain Jews, never to have been in bondage to any man, and yet it is lamentably true, that they cannot do the things which they would. A man thus circumstanced might, at first, be ready to conclude that there was something in his own case pe-

cular. But it is not so. It is a common allotment, and makes an important feature in the trial of faith, to which we are here subjected. There is that within every man, whatever may be the measure of his faith, which can be acted upon by the world around him, and which the world but too well knows how to act upon. We conceive this something to be, in certain cases, a sinful pride of nature; in other cases, a weakness; and in others, a vanity. But the world, like its father, the Devil, is sagacious, soon discovers every man's accessible point, and knows but too well how to lay hold upon it.

Now, we all have but one defence in common against the world's assaults, and the Scriptures record it: we must "add to our faith virtue," old Roman virtue spiritualized. If without faith it is impossible to please God; so, without the moral courage and power of endurance which virtue implies, our faith will never secure its victory over the world. Whatever the accessible point within our nature may be, whether some sinful affection, or weakness, or vanity, it will certainly become, if left to its own operation, a serious impediment in our heavenly way. It gives to the world's mystic appeal a force which it does not naturally possess, and secures to it a success which otherwise could never have attended it. The Scriptures abound with illustrations of this important truth, and teach us, both by precept and by recorded facts, that when virtue is added to faith, all things are possible to their subject. What he cannot overcome he will patiently endure, so that nothing shall seriously offend him, nothing shall turn him aside from his pathway to Heaven, nothing shall still the voice of his prayer or wither the confidence of his breast. O what obstacles in the way to

glory have not thus been surmounted by men of like passions with ourselves, and what tribulations have not been endured! Every occasion of trial has served but to inspirit the soul with celestial energy, and to surround with a brighter halo the victory of grace! Cast your eye over the tract of time through which the Christian Church has trod her upward way. What did she not encounter in the Roman power, in the Grecian literature, in the Jewish prejudice, in the pride of rulers, the vanity of philosophers, the interests of priests, and the madness of the people? We say nothing of the current and force of a fallen nature which has ever been arrayed against her, backed, as it always has been, by the malignity and artifice of a spiritual foe. And yet, by what secular arm has her real interests ever been advanced? What carnal weapon has ever been unsheathed in her defence which has not met with rebuke? When, without the punishment involved in discord and division, has she ever courted the popular impulse, or appealed to the passions or prejudices of mankind? And what is true of the Church as a body is true of her members in particular. The work before them has been one of pulling down and subjugation, as a prelude to moral renovation and beauty. The proud structures of a lofty nature have been subverted from the very foundations. Instinctive errors in every department of the intellectual and moral sphere have been detected, and exposed, and corrected, under the illuminations and energies of celestial fire, while the soul immortal has been introduced to her spiritual Deliverer, inspirited by Him with new hopes, and fitted for new and infinitely purer enjoyment. If we look back into the recorded history of the people of God, we shall discover the prevalence of the same economy

under which occasions of spiritual discouragement have, for the wisest purposes, been uniformly permitted to exist. Without the virtue implied in moral courage, or in patient endurance, the faith of Noah must inevitably have yielded, if not to the magnitude of the work before him, yet to the scoffs and derision of the world around him. To suppose him insensible to these assaults would be to suppose him angelic in his nature. He, doubtless, felt them, and felt them keenly; but he had added to his faith *virtue*—both moral courage to engage in an unpopular work, and fortitude to endure the peculiar trials which attended its prosecution. And who can contemplate this distinguished hero of the Church ultimately borne aloft, beyond the flood's fell power, and not perceive, in his elevation and security, a full recompense of reward to his perfected faith?

Surely there is a reward for the righteous. Doubtless there is a day of remuneration for all the temptations we may here endure—for all the mountains of difficulty we may here surmount; and though the natural sun may never reveal it, yet judgment will disclose it in seven-fold splendor, and in all the richness and exuberance of its precious rewards. In this view, also, the history of Abraham, of Joseph, of Daniel, of the holy Prophets and Apostles, becomes so many mirrors in which we may discover something in parallel of our own liabilities, and learn the painfulness of those virtues on which, nevertheless, the God of our salvation has impressed His seal. Were we left strangers to this species of trial, we should be left strangers also to the character of our faith, because strangers to the most ennobling virtues which it is the office of true faith to inspire. We should never exercise either that Christian courage which enters the gate of life, or that Christian

fortitude which endures the trials of the way. We might possibly hereafter be numbered with that class of hearers whom our Lord describes as "having no root in themselves ;"* whose root was in another man, or in some class of men ; who stood as they stood, or fell away in times of temptation, as they fell away. Here it may be well to notice some of the particular discouragements in the way to Heaven, which in our world we may reasonably expect. The world, indeed, furnishes only their occasion ; but whether the occasion succeed with us or not must depend on the fact whether the root which gives stability to the soul in the time of trial, is in ourselves or in others. When, like the Apostle, we are crucified to the world and the world to us, then the world's bidding to hold our peace will be disregarded by us, as it was by the blind man ; but while the world is enthroned as an imperial power, and our hearts retain their sensitiveness to its smiles or frowns, then what have we to expect but that its peremptory rebukes should be attended, to our souls, with the most baneful results ? We shall neither have courage to begin, nor fortitude to endure. We shall follow our "root," which grows downward in the world. One charge made by worldly men, with a view of discouragement, is, that by a religious seriousness and earnestness, our order of intellect or grade of intelligence may be thereby impugned. These men are willing to concede their respect to religion, and especially to its chief officers, whom they are ambitious to control. But as to any thing really serious, or earnest, or fervent in appeals for mercy, this is branded as a mark of superstition or of mental imbecility : "This

* Mark iv. 17.

people, who know not the Law, are cursed.”* The world claims within its own ranks men confessedly distinguished for their culture and vigorous intellects, who, in conceding their respect, and their countenance, and their support to religion considered as an auxiliary to the laws, and a safeguard to property, flatter themselves with the conceit, that they stand fully acquitted in this matter. But, in reality, what does all this self-delusion prove? Does it prove that these intellectual men have not souls to be saved? that they will not be judged by the Gospel? that they will not be acquitted or condemned by its rule? It proves no such thing. Let the pride of intellect be what it may, it leaves the question of these awful verities where God has placed it—on the imperishable basis of His own word. It proves rather that a man may be blessed with all the light which nature can give, yet labor under a darkness which nature cannot dispel. The feeblest Christian, seriously-minded and earnestly engaged in cries for mercy, is, in the sight of his Maker, a wiser being than the proudest monarch that ever swayed intellectual empire. The former has a spiritual faculty or sense which nature cannot give, and which, in the most important of all concerns, more than compensates for all which nature or education may have denied—we mean the faculty of faith, with virtue added thereto, without which the broader the intellect the more glaring the folly evinced. Bring them both into adversity, and then compare their wisdom. Bring them both to a dying hour, and then compare their forecast. Take the Word of God as a lantern, and follow both to the intermediate state, to the resurrection of the dead, to

* John vii. 49.

the judgment-seat of Christ, to the issues of eternity, and then let the merits of the question be decided. Now, it is true that, for the wisest purposes, the first conflicts of the Gospel in an evil world were sustained by very feeble-minded instrumentalities: for it pleased God to choose the weak things of the world to confound the things which were mighty. But should any infer from thence, that a serious and earnest pursuit of spiritual realities is not reconcilable with the highest order of natural intellect, or that the Gospel ranks will suffer on this point in comparison with those of the world, we may deny the justness of the conclusion, and appeal to facts. Natural intellect has never started one difficulty in the way to Heaven, which superior natural intellect has not removed. Another discouragement is addressed by the world to human weakness in another form. Some are made to believe that their business pursuits or their secular interests may be unfavorably affected thereby. Now, it is true the Christian world is divided. Narrow jealousies, moreover, and partisan feelings are apt to insinuate themselves into the common walks of life, and to give a restricted character to intercourse with men. But the true way to Heaven, as indicated by the Church, knows of no such pettinesses. Its spirit is large and liberal; and as it knows of no extension which the Gospel does not enjoin, so it knows of no restriction which the Gospel does not impose. But admitting the point, that a man's secular views or interests may be hindered or impaired by seriousness and earnestness in religion;—what then? Is our interest in Christ, our improvement of a passing opportunity which may never recur, our peace here and our happiness hereafter, to be thus bartered? And can a man believe for a moment that his heart is

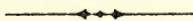
right with God, when the concerns of his soul are so lightly esteemed as to be thus compromised? O! how impressive is that memorable appeal made by our Lord to this peculiar temper of mind! "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* Let these sagacious calculators on the costs of religion take into their account the decisions of the great day, when all the impelling motives to action will be scrutinized, and let the recorded scene there exhibited have a seasonable influence on their course.

A few words in conclusion, will dispose of our second proposition, which is to show the right use we should make of these and of all other charges to hold our peace, proceeding from the world, the flesh, or the devil. "But he cried the more, a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." If the first serious movements in the pathway to heaven answer no other valuable purpose, they will serve at least to reveal obstacles in that way which before were not suspected to exist. The blind man could scarcely have dreamed, that in his first and feeble endeavors to obtain mercy, he was thus to be charged to hold his peace. But no sooner had the feeling of his necessity combined with the hope of relief and inspirited his prayers, than he meets with a sharp rebuke. There were many to cry down his prayers, but few to comfort his heart. And this is ordinarily the case, whenever men exceed the limits of the world's respect for religion, and begin to take up their salvation as a serious work. They make new discoveries, and begin to realize the force of our

* Matt. xvi. 26.

Lord's descriptive terms of his own religion, that its gate is straight, and its way narrow. Trials thicken around. If these were to be listened to, the man, it would seem, however deeply affected by a concern for his soul, is to sit still, to hold his peace, while the accepted time and day of salvation roll by unimproved. He is to live prayerless and to die in his sins, be the realities of an eternal world what they may. Surely, the charge of the many were unreasonable, even though it referred only to some temporal relief. But in relation to the concerns of the soul, the charge is preposterous. Shall we wonder then, that the blind man cried the more, a great deal? So far from holding his peace, his prayers became more perseveringly importunate. And this, we say, is the right use and improvement of all the drawbacks we meet with on our road to heaven. They should incite the soul to more frequent and earnest prayer; to a deeper repentance, and to a livelier faith in the Son of God as the compassionate Redeemer, the all-sufficient friend of our needy souls. Men ought always to pray and not to faint. They should be of good courage in coming to Christ, for they are called by His Gospel; and they should patiently and prayerfully endure their temptations, for when they are tried they shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him. Trials give new life to prayer. And prayer, when proceeding from a lowly and believing heart, narrows the space between the soul and her Redeemer. She is comforted and blessed in the nearness of her approach, and returns to her conflict to fill up that which is behind of her appointed discipline. O may the spirit of faith, and of virtue added thereto, inspire every heart, and prompt a higher, a more

spiritual, and less distrustful obedience. Soon our journey heavenwards would be inspirited with songs, and the incitements to despondency serve but to increase the fervency and affection of our prayers, and to reveal to the soul the all-sufficient grace of her Redeemer and friend.



SERMON XVIII.

BARTIMEUS CALLED.

“And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called; and they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.”—St. Mark, x. 49, 50.

WE have in these words the second section of the narrative of blind Bartimeus. And as we have already considered the occasions of discouragement, under which some are kept back from the public profession of their faith, and others turned aside from heaven after this profession has been made, we are now, on the other hand, presented in the text with the more pleasing side of the same picture; we mean the persuasive motives which cheered the blind man's heart, inspired his action, and drew him, as by silver cords, into audience with his Redeemer. “And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called; and they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; He calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.” The points here which we wish to improve are, first, the Gospel motives of

encouragement in the way to life; secondly, our individual appropriation of these motives. When the Scriptures refer to these motives of encouragement, they teach us to regard them as the offspring of God's free, unmerited grace in the covenant of redemption. As by grace only we are saved, so by grace only are we aided in every aspiration of the soul heavenwards, and in every movement of the heart and mind in our return to God. Hence such interesting scriptures as these: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all."* "In due time, Christ died for the ungodly."† "Who gave Himself a ransom for all."‡ "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us."§ "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."||

All these, with other scriptures, show that however diversified the streams which comfort and strengthen man, and through whatever channel conveyed to us, God, in the sure covenant of Redemption, is their spring and source; a covenant originating in his unalterable love, ratified and confirmed by the blood and sufferings of his Son, replete, through the Holy Ghost, with all spiritual blessings, and comprehending within the grasp of its intention and sufficiency the broad family of mankind. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."¶ This is one of those bright and heart-affect-

* Rom. viii. 32.

§ Titus iii. 5.

† Rom. v. 6.

|| Eph. ii. 8.

‡ 1 Tim. ii. 6.

¶ John iii. 16, 17.

ing revelations of Jesus Christ which admits of no comment, because it needs none; an illuminating word of life proceeding out of his mouth, which shines into the heart with celestial radiance, dissipating its natural gloom, quieting the apprehensions of our fallen nature, and warming into life and energy every dormant faculty and power of the soul. And, without this illuminating and regenerating influence which the Gospel imparts, what is the soul of man but a spiritual embodiment of the materials of hopelessness and dismay—an existence unreconciled to God, and therefore in itself essentially unhappy? When the Scriptures refer to this unvisited state of the souls of men, how cheerless the imagery they employ! “A people sitting in darkness and in the region and shadow of death.”* See it pictured in the extreme circumstance of the subject of our narrative. Contemplate this man previously to his visitation by mercy—severed and estranged from the social intercourse and sympathy of all the friends of his youth; cast out from all benign countenances, houseless and homeless; sitting forlorn by the wayside, his heart daily withering under its oppression, his eye hermetically closed on all the beauty which nature had spread around him, his ear familiar only with impertinences and rebuke; himself the sport of the tempest without while pinched by penury within; charged by many to hold his peace, even under the instinctive cries of a dawning hope, and almost overborne in the first glimmerings of hope itself. Contemplate, we say, this picture, and let inspiration decide in what lineament of its forlornness it is not measured, nay, transcended, by the soul while yet unvisited and uncheered by the day-star from on high!

* Matt. iv. 16.

The inestimable love of God, then, in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, the scope of spiritual blessings embraced within this redemption, the means of grace it affords, and the hope of glory it inspires, must constitute for ever the spring and source of all effectual encouragement to the soul, whether to begin or to prosecute her heavenward course. When the Apostle would stir up our best affections and enliven our hopes, we may perceive with what assured confidence he derives from this exhaustless source supplies of spiritual strength and support. Have we daily need to sweeten and refresh our spirits with considerations of God, as our reconciled Father, to draw nigh to Him, and to walk with Him, and to converse with Him in humble confidence and affection? Hear the Apostle: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage, again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."* Observe how he incites the soul to patient endurance of all the adversities and troubles which may intervene between her and the possession and enjoyment of imperishable good: "For we are saved by hope. But hope that is seen, is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it."† See again how he presses to fervent unceasing prayer: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; and He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God."‡

* Rom. viii. 15.

† viii. 24.

‡ viii. 26.

Mark, too, the cheering assurance given us under all the changes and chances of this mortal life: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God—to them that are the called according to his purpose."* Mark, too, the support which the soul receives, in her way to God, against the fraud, the malice, the secret plots and open assaults of the Arch Enemy, with all his subordinate instrumentalities: "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"† Mark, too, the grand antidote to soul-corroding cares and anxieties: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not, with Him also, freely give us all things?"‡ Mark, once more, the grand counter-vailing consideration to the fierce accusations of Satan which would often tempt the soul to dismay; to those of a violated law which would threaten the soul with death; to those of conscience which, when armed, fill the soul with awful misgivings and racking apprehensions: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."§ And it is observable that, in the close of this luminous array of spiritual encouragements, the Apostle would not have them regarded as mere stays to the soul, or meagre equivalents for the occasions of discouragement she must here necessarily encounter, leaving the soul to vacillate painfully, as it were, between hopes and fears; but rather as preponderating consolations and supports, ministering effectually to the triumph and joy of the soul, either

* Rom. viii. 28.

† viii. 31.

‡ viii. 32.

§ viii. 33, 34.

while entering upon or prosecuting her onward and upward course. "Nay," says he, "in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us."* So far from being a loser, the soul is a great gainer by all these things; brought out of them all with indisputable advantage to herself—strengthened in her faith, enlarged in her sphere of comfort, brightened in her hopes, and increased in the richness and perpetuity of her rewards.

But though the Apostle's enumeration to which we have referred comprehends an invaluable legacy of spiritual aids to the soul, for the race which the Gospel sets before her, it does not embrace immediately that class of aids suggested by the terms of our text. We there contemplate the Redeemer and Friend of sinners arrested in his general course by the earnestness and importunity of a particular case. "He stood still," as the Trustee of Heaven's grace and mercy to every man according as he hath need; and in condescension to the wants and apprehensions of a poor, blind, miserable applicant, commanded him to be called. Here, then, we are introduced at once to one of the most interesting features of the Gospel, than which no other so invincibly enchains the impoverished heart of man, or creates within the needy soul a more joyous and grateful impression. We mean the Divine regard for individuals—the particular tenderness of our Divine Shepherd to each member of the fold—the particular kindness and condescension of Heaven's first and great Trustee in behalf of each object of covenanted mercy and grace. "He stood still and commanded him to be called"—that single and solitary individual—that one importu-

* Rom. viii. 37.

nate petitioner. "Unto that man will I look who is of an humble and contrite heart, and who trembleth at my word."* Thus are we taught there is a relation between the soul of each man and God his Redeemer, which really exists, and makes him the subject of particular Providential care, as much so as if each soul stood, as Adam once stood, in single audience with his Maker, receiving a revelation face to face. We say this is one of the most attractive features of the Gospel. This Gospel is restorative in its genius; and having by its great expiatory provision reconciled God to each individual of the broad family of mankind, its aim and its object is to reconcile each individual to God—"to slay the enmity" on the part of man, and to restore to the House of God, and to the provision of His table, and to the Paternal embrace, and to the enjoyment of His approbation and favor that prodigal son—that lost member of the original family, whom dejection from God had betrayed into death. Under previous dispensations, the evidence of Divine regard for individuals was less apparent, and consequently less controlling on the heart. Of Moses it is said, that the Lord "spake unto him face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend;"† and so inestimably regarded by Hagar in the desert was this special privilege, that, in the mixture of humbling and cheerful thoughts thus wrought within her breast, she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, "Thou God seest me."‡ But the privilege was of rare occurrence; so that the historian, in the close of the book of Deuteronomy, asserts "that there arose not a Prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face."

* Isaiah lxi. 2.

† Ex. xxxiii. 11.

‡ Gen. xvi. 13.

This feature was in reserve for the Gospel day, the illumination of which, when shed abroad, would disclose the interesting truth of an existing relation, through the mediation of the Eternal Son, between God and each soul of man, not less particular than were each soul a solitary existence within the universe. Accordingly, under the Gospel it is said,* that God shines into the heart of a man, to kindle the knowledge of His own glory in the face of Jesus Christ—manifesting Himself in the flesh as man—speaking to a man's soul face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend—standing still, as it were, on the highway of His own ordinances—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever—to give audience to each individual who has a petition to prefer, or a soul to be comforted and saved. Hear how he speaks to us individually: "What wilt thou, that I should do unto thee?" Friend, on what point of thy soul is the pressure?—where the secret disquietude?—what the burden of thy heart? And what is the Gospel to a man but a song upon an instrument, until this existing relation between its Divine Author and his own soul has been realized as something intrinsically precious? What is a Redeemer Himself to the soul but a stranger of general benevolence—a monarch in a foreign land, with no tenderness of discrimination, scattering benefits as he passes along, not unlike to the material sun, which rises upon the evil and the good, or as a passing cloud, pouring out its fatness upon the world irrespectively of earth or sea, the parched domain, or the impervious rock? On the contrary, when the peculiar genius of the Gospel is understood—when its tenderness and considerateness are appreciated—

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

when the empty soul realizes her own individuality, in the communion of saints and the ministration of the Redeemer, as the continually repeated action of a living friend with a special purpose towards herself, then the true notion, as upon the mind of Hagar in the desert, breaks in, and the soul is filled with mingled and abiding impressions of God's goodness and condescension. Now, although from our general knowledge of the Gospel we shall find no difficulty in conceding to its economy this discriminating feature; yet how difficult is it to bring the conviction home to the heart, and to treasure it there, as an abiding source of spiritual consolation and support? We are constantly disposed to deal in generalities, unmindful of the truth that a generality falls powerless, and can never meet the deep necessities of the soul. Let us suppose that the blind man, under the earnestness and importunity of his cry, had been met with large assurances of the Divine benignity and compassion to our race; how unsatisfactory, how cold and comfortless would not the suggestion, however true, have fallen upon his heart? Would not doubts and uncertainties have still prevailed whether a doctrine true in itself might not be false in its application; and if so, on what evidence might he safely and confidently infer its applicability to himself? This, in reality, is often the difficulty which many seriously disposed persons do encounter. They admit the general doctrine of Christ's atonement for the sins of the whole world; but the peculiar turn of their own hearts predisposes them to distrust any particular, much less a home appropriation. On the contrary, mark the spirit evinced by the blind man, when his comfort is proposed on the ground of a special call, and in his own individual behalf. Mark

the attending bound of joyful eagerness which animated his soul—how he rose, how he laid aside every weight, how he cast off every entanglement which might incommode his progress through a crowd, nor stopped till at the feet of his Divine Friend his soul was bowed and her burden laid down.

And is all this of any private interpretation? Does it end with the blind man of whom it is related? On the contrary, is it not the voice of all Scripture, that my Redeemer liveth, my Lord and my God; that He calleth His own sheep by name; that He looks unto "that man"* with a tender and discriminating eye; that He knew Nathaniel while under the fig-tree; that His eye is over each individual, and understands him in all his own peculiar thoughts and feelings; that He sympathizes in each joy or sorrow of the soul, in each hope and under each temptation; that He interests Himself in each anxiety, in each remembrance, in each rise and fall of the spirit? What was the commission given to the Apostles, but a command to call thy spirit in the singleness of her individuality, as though there were no other existence on earth? On what are all good comforts propounded for thy acceptance, but on the ground of this discriminating call? Thou art called only according to His purpose. And thou art called in order to be justified and made a partaker of all other spiritual blessings, terminating in eternal life and glory. From thine infancy to the present moment, thy Redeemer has been about thy path and about thy bed, and has laid nothing upon thee to endure, but that which, with His wisdom and forecast, thou wouldst have laid upon thyself.

* Is. lxvi. 2.

A few general remarks suggested by the topic will close our discourse. The individuality of the soul, and consequently the particular relation she sustains to the Redeemer, is one of those grand encouragements to the needy which the Gospel creates, and which cannot be too closely incorporated with our inmost thought. There are thousands in the world, who have lived strangers to the true notion of their spiritual relations. They float down the current of the world, or the current of the great body of Christians with whom they may be associated. Such persons must necessarily be deficient in the required comforts, encouragements, and supports of the soul. They may do well enough, indeed, while basking in the sunshine of more prosperous days, but when the world fails them, they fall away; they sink into despondence, if not into despair. They do not realize the presence of the Redeemer in their own souls; they do not hear his voice addressed to themselves, nor experience its consolations. Religion has been with them an opinion floating in the head, rather than a substance within the soul; and the day of trial has revealed its insufficiency. Such should remember that the Gospel is a general provision in the sense only as comprehending within its intention and sufficiency, all the individuals and each of which the world is composed. But it deals with these individuals as such, not as congregations or communities. It calls each one by name, and regards and consults for each individual case, as that case comes before it. Its address is, "What wouldst thou that I should do unto thee?"

Again: The impelling sense of need is the call of the Redeemer on its subject. He came to seek, and to save, only that which was lost. He bids the weary and heavy laden only, to come unto Him. Such should

be of good comfort, for they are called. The Redeemer's course is arrested for that man's sake. He waits to be gracious; and him that cometh, He will in no wise cast out. On the contrary, his blind eye shall be opened, his deaf ear shall be unstopped, his empty soul shall be filled with goodness, and within his own happy experience, he shall attest the all-sufficient grace of his Redeemer.

Again: We need beware of an opposite error in religion into which we are liable to run. We mean a narrow-mindedness in limiting to ourselves, what God has been pleased to apportion unto all. If we have realized the individuality of our souls, and have tasted and seen, within our own separate sphere, how gracious the Lord is—this should impress the heart with the belief, not that we as individuals are especial objects of divine love and favor; this would be spiritual arrogance, not unlike to the error of the Jews, who, because of the privileges conferred upon themselves as a nation, despised all other nations. But the divine grace and mercy in our own case, should lead us to conclude, that the Lord is loving unto every man. The Apostle always reasoned in this way, inferring from God's merciful interposition in his own behalf, the divine benignity in relation to all other individuals. He could never despair of any man, when he reflected on the mental blindness and obliquity from which he himself had been graciously delivered.

Finally: Let no man conclude, whatever may be the sense of his need and the clearness of the divine call thereby evinced, that there are no weights or entanglements to be gotten rid of, before he can hope to come successfully, if indeed he be not thereby hindered from coming at all. The blind man, at the call of

Jesus, cast away his garment. It retarded his motion, even if it did not threaten his effort with entire defeat. It is especially so with those who defer obedience to their respective calls, till the later period of life. They have many weights to lay aside, and especially the sin, which, like a garment, does so easily beset them. Why is it that so many, with lively impressions of religion, are nevertheless kept back, while others who have entered the course are sorely hindered, if not turned aside, making but little progress in the pathway of life? Have we no reason to apprehend, that weights have been retained which should have been laid aside? Have we no reason to fear that the old besetment is regaining its hold? Alas! how many are entangled in every moving power, so that they can neither rise nor advance—are spell-bound, as by some horrible incantation, under which many precious seasons have passed by, now lost for ever. May God in infinite mercy interpose in our behalf, who are sore let and hindered in running our race, and speedily help and deliver us, for His dear Son's sake.—Amen.



SERMON XIX.

THE WELL OF LIVING WATER IN THE HEART.

“But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”—St. John iv. 14.

THAT there is a supernatural power given unto us freely, as members of Holy Church, the Communion of Saints, and which makes us its instruments in working out o

own salvation, is one of those deeply interesting truths which inspired wisdom has revealed. We call this free gift "a power." We may call it "Grace," we may call it "God working in us to will and to do," or "the Grace of God by Christ in us." In our baptismal service it is referred to as "that which by nature we cannot have." The descriptive terms employed in Scripture in reference to this gift are various. As our Lord figuratively expresses it in our text, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." We purpose then to speak, first, of this supernatural power itself; then, of its appointed instruments; and lastly, of its improvement by us or neglect.

And, first, of the supernatural power itself: "The water that I shall give him." That his own Gospel, in its power and life, is here referred to by our Lord, no doubt can be entertained. It is not a Gospel heard merely by the hearing of the ear, or read with the eye on the sacred page; neither is it a Gospel intellectually received only, as when by process of thought we arrive at a clear insight into some branch of philosophy or science; the water given by our Lord is the substance of the Gospel, as incorporated into the soul; it is that to which the Evangelist refers when he says, "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the Sons of God;"* *that* to which the Apostle refers when he says, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation."† It is a power within the soul, though not of the soul. "The power which worketh in us,"‡ as the Apostle speaks, "that I shall give him," says our Lord; though

* St. John i. 12.

† Rom. i. 16.

‡ Eph. iii. 20.

from circumstance the gift may not be understood, or even known to be possessed, by him to whom it is given, much less appreciated, stirred up, and improved. What is more, it is a power within the soul, of undefinable comprehension. "It is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."* This shows that a member of the Church, as such, is never straitened in this supernatural gift. He has a broad and effective power at the disposal of his faith and in the line of salvation. If straitened at all, he is straitened in his own will. He is less ready to work than is the gift to empower his obedience. The Gospel referred to in our text is of that nature which, where it is truly received into a willing mind, and co-operated with in our humble and patient endeavors, "springeth up into everlasting life." Now we need not marvel at this endowment of the soul with a power which, however elementary in its origin, yet in its evolution of strength so changes the nature and aspect of our spiritual being as that it may be fitly said we are thereby "created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works." The analogies in relation to this heavenly gift are every where before us. We are all conscious of a gift from God which makes us what a mere animal is not. We call this natural gift reason, and it would be the same gift of power were we to call it by any other name. In the course of its development it changes our being from apparently the mere animal to the intellectual and moral. This change, indeed, involves a great mystery; but the fact is before us whenever we compare a reasonable man with one who providentially has been denied the gift or its excellent benefit. But how im-

* Eph. iii. 20.

perfectly understood, if at all, is the process by which the change referred to is effected! That reason is a power which worketh in some and worketh not in others, is certain; but how mysterious to us is not both the power and the manner of its operation! Now the Gospel proper is the power of God in the soul of man for a specific end; a power of infinitely higher force and comprehension, in relation to its object, than the power of reason has ever proved itself to be, or was ever designed to be by its Giver. The Apostle shows this. For after that the world, by the highest culture of its best natural endowment, knew not God, it pleased God by the revelation of a higher gift within the soul of man, to save them that believe. How this gift "worketh in us," we are but very imperfectly, if at all, acquainted. It cannot be otherwise. We know not, we said, how the rational power works, and yet we know that, perfected through its proper aliment, and guided by the light of science, it has wrought in some men mightily, and in all men wonderfully elevated their nature beyond the mere animal. We know this also, that the rational power is improvable to an indefinite extent.

Truly the power implied in the Gospel is a great mystery, both in itself, in its application to the soul, and in the manner of its operation. Its effects even within the present life, as seen by contrast, are as wonderful to us as they are indisputable. It penetrates, moreover, into the eternal world, where the gift of reason dare not aspire—reveals to the soul's knowledge, possession, and enjoyment, much of the communicable fulness of God—has introduced her to the broad extent of her communion, comprehending the whole family in Heaven and on earth, thereby exalting,

ennobling, and purifying her spiritual being. Nor is it less affirmable of the supernatural than the rational gift, that the power implied in its application to us, is elementary in its origin. In either case there is a small beginning, a mere faculty at first; in either instance the power implied embraces within its distinctive lines a universal dominion. The mustard seed becomes a great tree; the little leaven leavens the whole lump; the drink of water, given by our Lord, becomes within the soul a well of water, springing up into everlasting life. Under this head we may further remark, that the *supernatural*, not less than the *rational* power, however freely conferred in its elementary stage, is made dependent for its well-being and effectiveness on our own instrumentality. Either of the gifts of God to us, whether the natural or the spiritual, is of that nature which requires to be awakened from a slumber, stirred up, cultured, and drawn out. Look, for instance, at the natural gift. How many young persons of strong and even brilliant parts, have not, by neglect of the gift that is in them, through an indolent or sensual habit, emaciated and enfeebled all that pertained to their intellectual and moral elevation, and to their usefulness in the walks of life! On the contrary, the fact is equally notorious, that young persons even below mediocrity in the measure of gift, have nevertheless, by a due appreciation of what God had been pleased to bestow upon them, been enabled to make full proof of their own measure. And how have not these persons surmounted their difficulties! How, in numberless instances, have they not outstripped others who in Providence were more nobly destined, and by nature more munificently endowed! Their fidelity to a slender trustship has ultimately found its recompense of re-

ward. It is just so in the case before us. The supernatural power implied in the Gospel, considered as an endowment of the soul through the second birth, is, for wise purposes, very unequally distributed among the individual members of the same body. It is said in the parable: "Unto one he gave five talents; to another, two; and to another, one: to every man according to his several ability."* What is implied in this "ability," which measures the original gift, we cannot now fully comprehend. It is known unto God. We may reasonably fix its reference to particular dispensations of the Church, or to particular stations within the Church, or to chosen instrumentalities in effecting special ends. We know that the Apostles, as founders, were endowed with singular gifts of the Holy Ghost; but no member of Christ's mystical body, as such, is left comfortless. A drink of water is given to every one, and if rightly appreciated, may become, under the Spirit, a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

Let us now proceed to consider the appointed instruments of this power. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." That, ordinarily, baptized persons must be here referred to by our Lord, is evidently, from her baptismal service, the sense of the Church, and her sense is well sustained by the tenor of Scripture. Hence that remarkable form of speech employed by our Lord: "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."† To see the Kingdom of God is to realize its power working in us, mortifying the works of the flesh and our

* Matt. xxv. 15.

† John iii. 5.

earthly members, and drawing up our mind to high and heavenly things. "So many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ," says an Apostle, "were baptized into his death."* To be baptized into the death of Christ is to be made partakers of its benefits, the most excellent of which is supernatural power working in our own souls, under which power we become sons of God. We, indeed, dare not limit God absolutely in the bestowal of this power, to His own most holy Sacrament; but in the passage quoted, we may see how our Lord limits our ordinary expectations, as grounded on the written Word, to this Sacrament. The great necessity of this Sacrament, where it may be had, must be evident unto all men diligently reading Holy Scripture. Here it is, that being truly desirous to find admission for ourselves and for our households, we knock at the door of the Kingdom. We humbly rely on the gracious promise, that it shall be opened unto us. Here we ask for the gift above nature; here we seek it, according to the will of God, and in the way of His appointment. And we shall do this in good faith, believing that God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself—that He is more ready to hear than we to pray, and is wont to give more than either we desire or deserve. We are told: "As many of you as are baptized into Christ are baptized into His death;" they have been made to drink at the same Fountain once opened to the Saints, of the same spiritual waters—have become instruments of so excellent a benefit of God in the work of their own salvation, and are accountable to God for its improvement.

* Rom. vi. 3.

Should one ask, How am I to be assured of having been thus supernaturally endowed? we may answer, How are you assured of having been rationally endowed? You neither see the gift with your eyes, nor handle it with your hands. You have the witness of rational endowment in yourself—a testimony which you can neither define nor explain. In addition to this inward testimony to your rational endowment, you arrive at other testimonies by an inductive process—in other words, by stirring up and using the gift itself. It is just so in the case before us. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself, which he can neither define nor explain. In addition to this inward testimony, in which the Spirit itself beareth witness, he has the testimony of his own spirit by an inductive process. An illustration of this kind of testimony is happily afforded in our 17th Article, where it is said: “These godly persons feel in themselves the workings of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation, to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God.” Truly the power implied in the Gospel, by whatever name distinguished, worketh in us, and is able to work, accumulating its own testimonies, exceeding abundantly over all that we ask or think. We repeat it, if a member of the Church be straitened, he is straitened neither in the power nor in the Church dispensation of the power, but in the perverseness of his own will, and in the contractedness of his own heart. The sentiment of the Apostle, expressed to the Corinthians, is now the sentiment of the Church in re-

lation to every child incorporated into her bosom: "O, ye Corinthians! our mouth is opened unto you; our heart is enlarged."* She is in trust of a treasure in its broad dimension, and in all its effectiveness, through faith unto salvation; and the best return in acknowledgment of Christ, in the maternal overflowing of His Church, we can make, and the only recompense in the same, required of us, is, to be "also enlarged"—to cherish corresponding sentiments and emotions, where all within the sacred inclosure we inhabit is large, liberal, and springing up into everlasting life. Mournful, indeed, is the consideration, that within a vineyard so highly favored and so richly endowed, a plant should ever be found barren and unfruitful in the power under which so many have attained unto the fulness of their joy! Alas! our eyes are but too often blinded, so that they cannot discern the priceless value of the gifts of God to man, through Christ our Lord.

How affecting in this view becomes not the prayer of the Apostle, that according to the riches of his glory, God would grant to such, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man—that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith—that they, being rooted and grounded in love, might be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that they might be filled with all the fulness of God!† Of no truth are we more confidently assured in Scripture than of the one before us; we mean our appointed instrumentality, under the power which worketh in us. But however freely this gift is bestowed, in its elementary form, it will

* 2 Cor. vi. 11.

† Eph. iii. 16.

live and grow in us by faith only. In the Apostle's invocation to which we have referred, we see the condition which qualifies his prayer. "That Christ," says the Apostle, "may dwell in your hearts by faith." We must unfeignedly believe in this supernatural gift. We must unfeignedly believe in its broad comprehension; in its sufficiency for both worlds. It is the power of God unto salvation, and grateful should we all be, that ours it is, under the allotment of Providence and the call of God, to be at once the instrument and the beneficiary of it.

Lastly: We may consider the consequences attendant on the improvement or neglect of this gift. If the question here arise, What is implied in the improvement of this supernatural gift? we may answer, What is implied in the improvement of the rational gift? We all know that reason in its elementary form and as contemplated in one of tender years, is but a feeble power, if indeed, at this time, the term "power" can with fitness apply. It is a thing of culture and growth, and its early deficiencies are amply compensated for in the family compact. By degrees, however, and in due time, it acquires strength, boldness and enterprise, and these will be proportioned to the assiduous care with which this gift is brought out; sharpened and burnished by reading, by observation, by patient thought, and especially by collision with other like powers, as we mingle in the world around us. "As iron sharpeneth iron," says Solomon, "so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."* From which it would seem, that loneliness is not friendly to the improvement of the rational gift. This is best ef-

* 1 Prov. xxvii. 17.

fectured by intercourse and collision of mind with mind. We know also that simply to maintain their stand, men must improve their faculties in this way, to say nothing of keeping pace with the march of intellect, or of making bold and adventurous incursions into regions of thought yet unexplored. Well, it is just so in the present case. The infant soul is inspired with a seminal principle from on high, through that very act of the Spirit which baptizes her into the mystical body of Christ. She is incorporated into a spiritual family, and the deficiencies of her individual endowment are abundantly compensated in the maturer wisdom of the Church. In the case of tender age, we all know the duties enjoined by the Apostle on Christian parents. Parents administer only in the name of Christ the child's personal interest in the Kingdom of God, and with special reference to its improvement. This is termed, bringing them up in the Lord's nurture and admonition. Lose sight of this fundamental principle in the religious education of children—we mean a sacred recognition of the objective gift of grace and the Lord's interest in this gift—and you lose sight of the main spring of the Christian theory. The legitimate end of religious nurture, is to introduce the child to its own supernatural inheritance; that he may see the Kingdom of God within his own soul, that is, begin to realize the power which worketh in him. In due time, his gift will have matured itself into an available root. He will stand by faith. You shall see this person, in the individuality of his own soul, however associated with others, coming forward to the Bishop in all humility, and under the power which worketh in him, to ratify and confirm his title to an incorruptible inheritance, and in full recognition of his personal instru-

mentality. And this person, under the same power, which worketh in him, shall follow on to know the Lord, having respect unto all his commandments. He shall run, and not be weary; he shall walk, and not faint. "But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." But if we bring up a child educationally merely, on general principles of natural susceptibility, with no reference to the individuality of his own soul, nor to her supernatural endowment; with no helps to his own realization of the Kingdom of God; with no gentle incitements to the ventures of faith; why what in the issue have we to expect? What should we expect of one under like treatment of the rational gift, but to contemplate in the issue, a man merged in the multitude of existences around him—an existence with no root in itself; with no strength of individuality; a tool for the designing; a mere creature of circumstance, destined in all probability to fall a victim to sensual allurements? Growth in grace, with its attainment to glory and honor hereafter, is but the development within the soul of grace here given. It is living water within the spirit of a man welling on to eternity.

Finally: Let no man, because of early superinduced and long-continued neglect of his supernatural gift, hastily conclude on its having been withdrawn. God is long-suffering towards us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. It is possible that he may need but a determination of the will to stir up, under God, what had long since and so freely been bestowed. We all know that, in numberless other instances, our own indisposition had long been confounded in our minds with inability. In how many instances, moreover, have not men succeeded in

some enterprise of acknowledged obligation and duty, even beyond their most sanguine expectations. The bankers in the parable, trading on their Lord's money, were surprised at their own success. But then, if, in other matters, these things be so, may there not be impiety in resolving into an insuperable difficulty in the way of obedience, what may be the effect only of a slothful will? The Scriptures refer to some who shut their eyes and closed their ears, lest they should be converted from their evil way, and God should heal them. So in all ages, there will be men who fear to stir their gift, lest the power implied should begin to work and separate them from sins to which their hearts are tied and bound, and from which they have no wish to be separated. How solemn are the Divine monitions touching this delusion! "Ye will not come unto me," said our Lord, "that ye might have life."* "How often would I have gathered thy children together, and ye would not."† So also in the way of encouragement to stir up the gift. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."‡ "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land."§ Other passages of a like import abound; but here is enough to show that, if shut out eternally from the Kingdom of God, our miserable doom will be justly ascribable to no insufficiency of supernatural endowment; but to the prevalence of unruly will and affection, which so far from mortifying we have chosen to sustain. "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?"|| Why should a member of Christ and heir of Heaven, supernaturally endowed, neglect so great salvation? How appalling the consideration, that the

* St. John v. 40.

† Matt. xxiii. 37.

‡ John vii. 17.

§ Is. i. 19.

|| Ezek. xviii. 31.

contempt of the spiritual drink now given, which, under a reasonable appreciation, must soon have become within the soul a living fountain, springing up into everlasting life, should be succeeded by unavailing importunity for a drop of consolation to soothe the corrosions of an endless self-reproach. O then, if no other, let this be our heart's desire and prayer unto God, that He would make us willing in the day of His power—that He would help us to subdue all unruly will and affection; disposing our hearts towards the attainment of everlasting life. “Let us go up at once,” said Caleb, “and possess the land, for we are well able to overcome it.”* Let this be our prevailing sentiment, under the power which worketh in us. We are able, well able. “I can do all things,” says an Apostle, “through Christ which strengtheneth me.”† Thus shall we mortify the wilfulness of unbelief we have so long indulged; and in the confidence of a certain faith, approve unto God our own instrumentality in the work of our salvation.



SERMON XX.

THE SINNER BOUND AND GUARDED IN PRISON.

“The same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and the keepers before the door kept the prison.”—Acts xii. 6.

THE narrative which opens with our text refers to a period of extraordinary persecution, when Herod the king stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the

* Num. xiii. 30.

† Phil. iv. 13.

Church. He killed with the sword the Apostle James, and finding this arbitrary act a popular measure, he proceeded to imprison others, reserving their execution for a set time. Among these latter was the Apostle Peter, now as distinguished for his constancy and fearless advocacy of the cause of Christ as once for his timidity and criminal defection. On the night, however, preceding the day appointed for his execution, he was made the subject of a miraculous deliverance. This deliverance, God willing, we shall consider in a separate discourse. At present we shall endeavor to turn to our spiritual profit, in the way of accommodation, the outward circumstances of Peter, as described in our text.

He was immured in the government prison-house. It was during the night, when darkness prevailed without and gross darkness within this dreary abode. He was sleeping. He slept between two soldiers, one of whom always kept watch while the other slept; he was bound with two chains, the off-links of which were riveted upon his guards. When they moved, he moved with them; when he slept, he slept between them; any mere effort of his own to sever his chains would but serve to draw up his guards into closer approximation. Lastly, the keepers before the door kept the prison. These were Roman sentinels—strong men armed, trained under the severest discipline, to whom a summary death was the penalty of unfaithfulness—these sentinels barred the approach of all friends. What a multiplication of securities! How appalling to the imagination! How it must have obliterated from the prisoner's mind every vestige of hope of escape! Such were the outward circumstances of Peter; and when these circumstances are considered and com-

pared with the sentiments every where inculcated in Scripture, we may perceive, under these multiplied securities which held his body, a sign of spiritual captivity. We may contemplate every unconverted sinner as also immured in a prison-house, in the night-season of his existence, when darkness prevails without and gross darkness within; we see him sleeping; on either side of him we see a dark principality which exercises over him a constant supervision and control; we see him bound with two chains which deride all his efforts at escape; every struggle in his own strength but draws up his guards the closer; lastly, we see before the avenue to his heart certain mysterious sentinels, unceasing in their vigilance, and who shut out from him all his friends. From this view of the text, then, and guided by its imagery, we purpose to discourse on the multiplied securities which hold the unconverted sinner under the power of the enemy. These are his prison-house; the night; his sleep; his two guards; his two chains; and lastly, the sentinels before the door, which keep the prison.

First, his prison-house. In Scripture, the abodes of men, considered as spiritual beings, are invariably presented under two aspects—the world and the Church. The Church is termed “The House of God,”* “The Kingdom of God’s dear Son.”† In opposition to the Church, the world is described by the Prophet as a prison-house. “But this is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison-houses; they are kept for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, Restore.”‡ Man was snared by the treachery of a dark, insidious power;

* Heb. x. 21.

† Col. i. 13.

‡ Is. xlii. 22.

robbed of the image of God, which consisted in righteousness and true holiness; spoiled in all his valuable endowments and resources of true enjoyment. The world thus virtually became a prison-house, an appendage to the kingdom of Satan. Here the sinner is represented as being hid—hid from all that belongs to his true peace, and retained under the very power which first ensnared, robbed, and spoiled him; and mark, he is kept for a prey, as the Roman power kept the body of Peter for a set time. The work of degradation, ruin, and misery, cannot be consummated in this prison-house. If not previously delivered by the Gospel and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, he will be brought out at a set time under the tyranny of this same dark power. But what renders this imprisonment in itself more frightful is the fact which this passage of Scripture discloses, and which is every where confirmed, that, though snared, robbed, spoiled, and imprisoned, "none delivereth"—that is, no mere earthly power. As David expresses it, "No man may deliver his brother nor make agreement unto God for him."* And so far is he from effecting his own deliverance, that, though spoiled in all his princely powers, he demands no restitution, "none saith, Restore:" on the contrary, he has become reconciled to his spoliation, connives at his own retention, has changed the matter of his humiliation into aliment for his pride. Such then is the prison-house, in opposition to the Church; such are its inmates, in opposition to the redeemed of the Lord, the household of God. Another form of security suggested by the text is the night season which reigns over the sinner's existence. He

* Ps. xlix. 7.

is as unable as indisposed to put forth exertion. Now even the most devoted servants of the Redeemer have their night seasons. From some perhaps unavoidable causes, connected with their present stage of existence, darkness will gather over their spirits. The Sun of righteousness, which shines habitually upon their souls, and comforts and invigorates all that is spiritual within them, may be eclipsed. The cause is doubtless in the imperfection of our present state. "We who are in this tabernacle do groan."* Even those divine principles and affections, by which the converted man is habitually governed and sanctified, are not exempted from the influence of a fallen nature. Under this influence, the servant of the Redeemer must often go mourning. His portion here is often to "walk in darkness, and to have no light." He will often fall into slumber. He will often have need to look unto Him who giveth repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins. He will often have need to pray, "Lord, increase my faith;" "Lord, I believe—help Thou mine unbelief."† But then with him the night is far spent—the day is at hand. Already is he contemplated casting off the works of darkness, and coming forth clothed in the armor of light. His faith begins to flow deep and strong; his feelings are renovated; hope revives, and gilds the prospect before him with strong rays of expectation, and even of assurance. His language is the predicted sentiment of Isaiah: "O Lord, I will praise Thee: though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortedst me."‡ But over the unconverted sinner the sceptre of night is altogether dominant. The question

* 2 Cor. v. 4.

† Mark ix. 24.

‡ Isaiah xii. 1.

in his case is not whether faith is a flowing river, deep and strong, or the scanty waters of a summer rill—for his spirit is dead; not whether the Christian temperament is ardent and active, or cold and sluggish—for the love of God is not in him; not whether the Divine promise is clear to his vision and intelligible to his heart, or whether he goes mourning as Jacob for his son—for, like Gallio, he careth for none of these things. No, he is dead in his sins, and in the uncircumcision of his flesh. She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth; she walketh in darkness, as though there was no light; she stumbleth at noonday; she mindeth earthly things, and here her cares, and her affections, and her sorrows, and her griefs are concentrated. And how appalling is this leaden reign of night over the soul of man! No man worketh in it. His inability to work is equalled only by his indisposition to work. An easy consequence of this species of security which the night-reign creates is, that the sinner sleepeth. “The same night Peter was sleeping.” And this is a feature in the unconverted state: its victim sleepeth. “They that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that are drunken, are drunken in the night.”* Now escapes from prison have been effected through the instrumentality of friends without; but success in this enterprise always supposes concurrence and co-operation on the part of the prisoner. If he be under a stupefying slumber, and consequently unconcerned in the matter, though there were neither guards within, nor chains, all efforts without must prove ineffectual. And O! what a resource for safe-keeping does not this dark stupor of the prisoner create! How appalling to the

* 1 Thes. v. 7.

imagination is sleep, at such a crisis ! In vain to the prisoner the interposition or the persuasion of friends—in vain the voice without, which has shaken the dead—in vain the Advent season, with all its inspiring hopes—in vain is deliverance proclaimed to the captives, the opening of the prison to them that are bound ! Behold ! a sagacious keeper has drugged his prisoner into deep slumber ! The poor victim has ears, and hears not—a heart, and feels not : he considers not his latter end. Terrible, however, as is this means of safe-keeping, the Satanic precaution stops not here. The unconverted sinner sleeps between two powers of darkness. “The same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers.” Unbelief and pride are the close and unremitting attendants of an unconverted state. The former is the offspring of guilt, and implies a deep-seated dishonesty ; the latter is the offspring of the Evil One, and is opposed to every sentiment of humiliation, under our painful discoveries. Together, they make no trivial agency in the safe-keeping of the prisoner. Now the best servants of the Redeemer are not unacquainted with these two powers ; but in their case these agencies of Satan are conquered, at least, if not subdued. Their inconvenience, indeed, is often perceived ; but their power is disregarded and contemned. The Christian sentiment under the assaults of unbelief and pride is : “Get thee behind me, Satan. Thou art an offence unto me ; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”* But the poor blinded sinner sleeps between his unbelief and his pride. Their power is unbroken. He is as averse to the light, as he is to humiliation under his convictions. They are to him two strong men, armed

* Matt. xvi. 23.

and together. They habitually tyrannize over his understanding, his conscience, and his heart; where they move, he moves also; whether they go out or come in, he follows in tame submission. Their decisions are his law, and their suggestions the practical rule and measure of his life. What a security have we here! How appalling the contemplation! Simple men are held by their simpleness; but in unbelief and pride we have a subaltern guard, adjusted in their nature to the wise man, to the mighty man, to men of high degree. But the safe-keeping ends not here. "The same night, Peter was bound with two chains." Sin and death originated in our apostacy from God; and with these two chains every apostate is fast bound. When the Apostle speaks of being made free by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, he enumerates these two chains as the powers from which his liberation was effected—the power of sin and the power of death. And look, these horrible chains which oppress the sinner are fast linked to his unbelief and pride. "Pride," says David, speaking of the impenitent, "compasseth them about with a chain."* But it is the chain of death. As well may we undertake to change the laws in the natural world as those in the moral world, under which unbelief and pride compass the sinner about with the chains of sin and death, and withholds him from his God. These chains have dragged angels out of Heaven, and thrust them down into Hell, where they are reserved under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. And O! how safely chained is not the helpless victim! While unbelief holds the sinner with a chain of sin, pride holds him as effectually with a chain of death. He is bound

* Ps. lxxiii. 6.

hand and foot. Under one he is impelled into the violation of the law ; by the other he is held under the penalty of his transgression. Hence that lamentable exclamation of the poor sinner, when his eye has been opened, and his heart has piteously responded to its own misery : “ Oh wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? ”* Finally, the safe-keeping of the unconverted sinner is perfected by the sentinels posted at his door. “ The same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains ; and the keepers before the door kept the prison.” It would be difficult to define what that moral action is, which, at the first glimpse of its approach, repels the saving truth of God from a man’s heart. The heart, like the eye, has its lid, which instinctively closes against certain truths, and bars their admission, just as the eyelid instinctively shuts out an offensive ray.

We take this keeper of the door to be that mysterious faculty originally given to guard the heart against the approach of evil : but which being, perverted by the fall, is now employed by the grand enemy to bar the access of redeeming friends. So that, whenever some converting truth would find admission within the heart, the lid closes by a kind of perverted instinct, and the ray is thrown back. The sentinel is still vigilant, but his vigilance is misdirected. When a Saviour approached the world, he was rejected by the world as an enemy because he revealed the truth ; and when we consider that the truth only which he revealed could make the world free, and that He who revealed it was hated, despitefully used, and finally crucified ; we may readily conceive how effectively the doors of this prison-house were kept. But what hap-

* Rom. vii. 24.

pened to the world in general, happens also in respect of every unconverted sinner. His faculty of vigilance is misemployed. As the Prophet expresses it, "It calls evil good, and good evil; puts darkness for light, and light for darkness; puts bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter."* Friends are excluded, while enemies are very cordially received. Now this instinctive faculty of the heart, this keeper of the door, is one of the most invaluable endowments of our nature, and is as competent to keep the Christian in his freedom, as it is to keep the unconverted man in the chains of sin and death.

See the sinner, as he chooses his reading, his friends, his companions, his counsellors, or his engagements. Mark him, as he eludes the question of death, judgment, and eternity, and then judge of the efficiency of the sentinels which guard his door. Merciful God! how his real friends are repelled. He cannot believe; for the truth can have no admittance within his door. An enemy hath blinded his eyes, and hardened his heart, that he should not see with his eyes, nor understand with his heart, lest the truth should convert him and make him free. "He that rejecteth me," said our Lord, "and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."† But, beloved friends, mistake us not; we have no pleasure in depicting from the word of God our melancholy circumstances as sinners. But the knowledge is essential to our individual rescue. Blessed be God, if we preach the ensnarement of our fellow-men by a dark insidious power, their robbed estate, the spoliations committed upon their resources of enjoyment, their imprisonment, and the mul-

* Isaiah v. 20.

† John xii. 48.

tiplied securities under which they are kept for a prey ; it is our office, also, to preach deliverance to the captives ; to promulgate inestimably precious truth ; truth that wins over the perverted vigilance which keeps the prison, opens the prison doors, enlightens that dreary abode with a great light, awakens the sleeper, subdues the two soldiers, severs the two chains, and sets at liberty them that are bruised. But to become interested in the deliverance, we must realize our enthrallment. They only who hunger and thirst shall be filled. They only who mourn shall be comforted. They only who are weary and heavy laden shall find rest to their souls. Meditate then upon your miserable state, and under the imagery furnished in the text, assist your understanding and your hearts ; but above all, look to the delivering power, in humble, earnest supplication, to bless your meditations, and to make you as willing to know the worst of your state, as His power is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him.



SERMON XXI.

THE SINNER RELEASED.

“ And behold, the Angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison ; and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly ; and his chains fell off from his hands.”—Acts xii. 7.

THE text presents the second section of that very instructive narrative, the opening of which has already claimed our attention. Peter was in prison ; it was du-

ring the night season; he slept between two soldiers; he was bound with two chains; the keepers before the door kept the prison. In this multiplication of securities, we endeavored, as through an outward and visible sign, to portray those invisible powers which, less obviously indeed, but not less securely, hold the unconverted under a degrading captivity.

From this brief review of the outward circumstances of Peter, considered as a sign of spiritual captivity, we shall proceed to consider the wonderful deliverance effected in his case as not less significant and instructive. "And behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined into the prison; and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly; and his chains fell off from his hands." Deliverance consists in Divine interposition on the one side, and in the performance of commanded duties on the other. First, Divine interposition: this comprehends the mediation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ between God and His offending creatures. Secondly: the communication of Divine light with its sacred energies to the human mind. "There is one mediator," says the Apostle, "between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all;"* the Apostle adds, "to be testified in due time;" that is, the mediation of Christ in behalf of all men is to be declared on the part of the Church, and acknowledged by making supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks.

In our narrative the Evangelist affirms, that while Peter was kept in prison, prayer was made without ceasing, of the Church, unto God for him. When the

* 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6.

Apostle writes to Timothy, a governor of the Church, he inculcates this important office of the Church: "I exhort," says he, "that, first of all"—that is, as the first and most obvious duty created by your own deliverance—"supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made *for all men* ;* for," adds the Apostle, "this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." He then gives the reason why the Church should acknowledge in behalf of all men. "For there is one God," and therefore in respect of all men inclinable to compassion, "and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all." We repeat it, therefore, as an important scriptural feature in the deliverance of the unconverted, neither generally understood nor sufficiently regarded, that the representative acknowledgment of Christ's mediatory sufferings and death on the part of the Church, by supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, and especially by the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, gives to the mediation of Jesus Christ an availableness in respect of an unconverted world which otherwise we are not authorized to expect. Look at the circumstances of Peter, as portrayed in the narrative. See the poor captive immured in a dungeon, involved in gross darkness, asleep between two dark subalterns, bound with two chains, while *without* unsleeping vigilance presides; then turn to the infant Church, hear her good and acceptable acknowledgments in his behalf of Christ's mediatory sufferings and death, her supplications, her prayers, her interces-

* 1 Tim. ii. 1.

sions, her giving of thanks. We say, contemplate the circumstances of Peter in one view, and the engagements of the Church in another, and then say, may we not expect some divine and, to us perhaps, inexplicable interposition—the sending forth of some chosen angel of deliverance, the shining of some heavenly light amid surrounding gloom? So it was. When the Angel of the Lord came upon Peter, a light shined in the prison, and the Angel smote him on the side. Jesus Christ himself is the fountain and source of religious truth. The Gospel comprehends those enlightening rays, and that measure of sacred energy, which are suited to the circumstances of the unconverted man, and which to him make up the power of God unto salvation. The light illuminates his mind, and the energy smites his conscience. We are not authorized to expect more light than is here revealed, or a heavier stroke upon the conscience than is here furnished. These make up what the Apostle terms “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,”* and beyond the provisions of a law we have nothing to look for. It is enough to be assured by inspiration, that the light and energies of the Gospel, this law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, made the chief of sinners free from the law of sin and death; and, as there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, and one representative agency to acknowledge the mediation, sufferings, and death of the Son of God, so every unconverted sinner who is blessed with the light of the Gospel, and with the light its inseparable strokes upon the conscience, has his deliverance put within his own hands. Life and death are set before him; escape from prison or continuance in pri-

* Rom. viii. 2.

son ; the house of God for his abode, or the dungeon wherein he is hid ; Heaven with its imperishable treasure, or Hell with its insufferable anguish and eternal desperation. We know, indeed, that on this subject men have created difficulties, but the Scriptures have created none. One fact here recorded is of more value, and immeasurably more conclusive, than all the metaphysical disquisitions which have emanated from the pride of man. Who can doubt for a moment but that Peter, if so inclined, could, with whatever uncertainty in the issue, have deferred the matter of his deliverance to a more convenient season, or have declined altogether the facilities which were put within his reach ? Who can doubt, that, in the circumstances in which he was placed, he might have substituted argument for concurrence, and listlessness for co-operation ? A prisoner between two soldiers, and bound with two chains, is not, without show of reason, to withhold all concurrence or co-operation with the light and power put forth for his rescue ; but these are his temptations, not his excuse. Nothing is more common than for men to construe their *temptations* into *arguments*, and to begin to reason where they should begin to obey. Divine interposition, then, in behalf of an unconverted sinner, is not an indefinite, but a restricted act, and is, therefore, termed a law—the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. This Spirit of life contains the light of divine truth, and the attending energies which smite the conscience : these God bestows freely through the mediation of Jesus Christ. He thus begins the good work of deliverance ; and if the prisoner will put forth his feeble efforts in his own behalf, God will most assuredly work with him, and through divine truth impart an efficiency to his endeavors not properly their

own; but if he frames an excuse for apathy out of temptations to apathy—if he begins to reason where he should begin to obey—he may, indeed, argumentatively sustain his unconverted state for the present, but he will be led from prison to judgment, and in judgment will be silenced by that very Gospel to which he now refuses to submit.

This leads us to consider the second feature in the deliverance of the captive. We mean the performance on our part of commanded duties. When Peter was shone upon and smitten on the side, he was commanded to “arise up quickly.” Repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, are the commanded duties. And it is worthy of remark, that while the Angel lifted up Peter, he commanded Peter to arise. This significant fact answers most conclusively all objections which can be started, on the incompetency of a sinner to repent and believe the Gospel. These duties are founded in authority, and not in our ability. Enough for us to know that when authority prescribes, it gives ability to perform. As the Angel lifted up Peter, while he commanded him to arise, so when God commands all men, every where, to repent, He gives to the willing mind ability to repent. So when He commands sinners to believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, He gives to the willing mind the power of believing. When God speaks, it is better to obey than to start objections. “Them that are meek shall He guide in judgment, and such as are gentle, them shall He learn His way.”* “If any man will do His will, He shall know of the doctrine.”† Had Peter been disposed to reason on his ability to rise,

* Ps. xxv. 9.

† John vii. 17.

never were there at once stronger grounds for argument, or weaker grounds for disobedience. But the willing and obedient mind, which the Gospel has enlightened and smitten, has every encouragement to follow on to know the Lord its Redeemer. In the willing and obedient, yet essentially feeble efforts for Peter to arise, you behold the two chains falling from his hands. Here all the objections of your enfeebled reason are met, all your doubts are anticipated, all your difficulties are solved by a plain matter of fact. Robbed as you are of the image of your God; spoiled as you are in all your resources of happiness; imprisoned as you are; plunged as you have been into the profoundest slumber; guarded as you are by unbelief and pride; bound as you are with the chains of sin and death; and perverted as has become your faculty of discrimination, yet, still there is hope. Another has been delivered, you may be. There is one God, and He your Father, and therefore all inclinable to compassion towards you. There is one Mediator between God and men, and therefore between you and your offended God. He gave Himself a ransom for all, and therefore a ransom for you. His Church acknowledges for all, and therefore has acknowledged for you. Already has the Gospel, like an Angel, come upon you. Its truth hath shined into your heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Its awakenings have stirred your conscience again and again, and bid you arouse from sleep and arise from death, with the precious promise annexed that Christ shall give you life. And shall this work of deliverance in your case be arrested? Will you continue to reason away the limited period of your probation? Will you halt in indecision, before

the authority of your God, and under the voice of your Redeemer? Will you still abide in a prison and cling to your chains? While an angel is with you, his light, and his voice, and his celestial glories, will you put forth no feeble effort in dependence upon your Redeemer? Will you mingle no acts of penitence and faith with prayers for repentance and faith? Will you mingle no conflicts with unbelief and pride, with prayers for deliverance? Will you shake off from no one practical power the loosened chains of sin and death? In a word, will you tamper with the goodness of God and the mediation of your Redeemer, and the acknowledgments of His Church, and the light of His truth, and the energies of His grace, and the salvation of your soul till the set time arrives, and you are led from prison to judgment, and from thence sink into eternity under irrevocable doom?

My unconverted friends, whatever importance you may assign to our ministry, we give you to-day its warning. Had Peter pursued the course for a moment, in which for years you have indulged, you would have pronounced him justly chargeable with the most unaccountable infatuation. How would not the angel of ministration have been grieved! What then must be the astonishment and grief felt by all good spirits, whether in Heaven or on earth, in view of your alarming delay! If it was expedient for him to arise quickly, under what sanction is your escape deferred? And if for a temporary preservation of the body he promptly willed and obeyed; by what rule or principle of calculation, can you reconcile to your reason or to your heart, the protracted exposure of your body and soul to insufferable and eternal woe? Beloved friends, let the smitings of the Gospel prevail; they are the gentle

smitings of an angel. There are other smitings, not less unequivocal in character, but more severe. They make the heart bleed, while they tear the conscience. Provoke not the slow work of a tender and compassionate Father; obey the angel of the covenant. The Gospel is in your prison; receive its light, and under its effusion of fire awake, arise, shake off sin and death, and humbly receive that life which is in Christ Jesus, your Redeemer.



SERMON XXII.

THE SINNER FOLLOWING HIS DELIVERER.

“And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself and bind on thy sandals: and so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him.”—Acts xii. 8.

THE text embraces the third section of the narrative which has claimed our attention on two former occasions. In the first section, we aimed to show what the unconverted state of a sinner is, and under what strong guards he is kept. In the second section we glanced at the nature of conversion, and the power by which it is effected. In the former instance, we have seen that the unconverted state is a complication of spiritual ignorance, insensibility, unbelief, and pride, terminating in the dominion of sin and death. In the second instance, we have seen that the delivering power is that measure of divine light and energy which the Gospel enfolds. These enlighten the understanding, smite the conscience, and awaken the heart; and with the concurrence and co-operation of their subject, deliver him

from the habitual control of unbelief and pride—the one the law of sin, the other the law of death. This deliverance is a Scriptural conversion. It is the triumph of spiritual affection over dark powers, and brings with it the pardon of sins, and peace with God. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* “This is the victory which overcometh the world,” says an Apostle, “even our faith.”† “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” But the liberation of a sinner is one thing; to stand fast in this liberty wherewith Christ hath made him free, is quite another. The one is a deliverance from the power, the other from the wiles of Satan. The Gospel, however, which delivers in the one case, is as profitable to deliver in the other. Accordingly, in our narrative, the very angel who delivered Peter from the chains is now witnessed in our text as a counsellor, instructing his liberated captive in the things which make for his future security: “And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself and bind on thy sandals; and so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee and follow me: and he went out, and followed him.”

Here are two points presented which claim our attention. First, the counsel given by the angel; and secondly, the willing and obedient spirit evinced by Peter. First, the counsel given by the angel. That a converted man needs counsel, will appear evident from the peculiarity of his circumstances. Once he was the subject, not so much of the wiles of Satan, as of his absolute power. His spirit, as the Apostle expresses it, was the “spirit of bondage:”‡ a spirit of tame submission

* Rom. v. 1.

† 1 John v. 45.

‡ Rom. viii. 15.

to the dictates of his unbelief and pride. Upon these, as upon two dark subalterns, his chains were riveted, and whithersoever they led the way he implicitly followed. Now where absolute power exists on the one side, and the spirit of bondage on the other, no necessity, on the part of Satan, will be perceived to resort to wiles. Neither in respect of the unconverted, need the wiles of Satan be practised. As well may we conceive that an imperious master would employ artifice in securing the obedience of his willing slave. No; his authority in the world is fully recognized. But the case is now materially altered. A converted man is represented in Scripture as being turned, not only from darkness to light, but from the power of Satan unto God. The chains have fallen from his hands. Though not now the subject of despotic power, he is nevertheless open to the wiles of Satan, and will most certainly become their object. When a captive is rescued from arbitrary power, this power will instinctively pursue. When Israel was rescued from Egyptian servitude, it is stated that Pharaoh made ready his chariot, and took his people with him: "And he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them."* It is, moreover, added that the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he pursued after the children of Israel. And it is invariably so in the case of every man rescued from the power of Satan. Sin and death, indeed, shall not have dominion over him, for these chains have fallen; but Satan will be permitted of God to enlist his chosen forces—yea, the very gates of Hell, and to employ all his wiles to recapture the liberated sinner, and to entangle him

* Ex. xiv. 6, 7.

again with the yoke of bondage. As now the wiles of a sagacious pursuer or the counsels of God prevail, so will the condition of the converted man be affected. If he cherishes a willing and obedient ear to the counsels of his deliverer, this deliverer will not suffer the gates of Hell to prevail against him, neither will he suffer him to be tempted beyond what he is able to bear; but with the temptation, wisely permitted, will also make a way for escape.* This was illustrated also in the case of Israel: a way of escape was opened through the Red Sea. But, if self-elated with his own deliverance from the power of Satan, he becomes vain in his imagination; if he despises him who is yet in chains; if he indicates that disposition which virtually says, "Stand off, for I am holier than thou;" in short, if, in the plenitude of his self-complacency, he mingles no trembling with his exultation, no humility with his happy deliverance, no acknowledgment of the Lord in all His ways; if he incline no ear to his deliverer, nor hear that his soul may live; as sure as this manner of spirit prevails, so sure, sooner or later, will Satan get the advantage over him, and again enslave him. Another peculiarity in the circumstances of the converted man, which renders divine counsel and its reception indispensable to security, is, that he is practically ignorant of the devices of Satan. He, indeed, by bitter experience, is well acquainted with his power: but as yet knows nothing of his peculiar line of approach, in his present circumstances. Where and when did he become acquainted with the devices of Satan? When did he detect this foul fiend wrapped up in sheep's clothing, or under the imposing habiliments of an angel

of light? In what school did he learn to discriminate between zeal for his own, and zeal for the cause of his God; between presumption and true faith; between humility and servility; between the imposing elevation of some disintegrated virtue, and the simplicity and integrity of the mind that is in Christ? When did he become acquainted with all those false and specious transformations of a dark and insidious enemy, which infinite wisdom alone could detect, and which the Scriptures alone expose? No, he is necessarily ignorant of the devices of Satan; a wind of doctrine will carry him about, and cunning craftiness, where least suspected, will lay in wait to deceive him. Had Peter been abandoned by the angel at the moment when his chains fell off, what inevitably would not have been his fate? His prison, as the narrative shows, and as ancient writers confirm, was most intricately constructed. Ward opened into ward. The avenue floors of the Roman prisons were studded with iron points; through these, and running in diverse and complex directions, were what the Romans termed "vestigia," or footsteps. In these footsteps, though indefinite numbers might follow on, but one could lead aright. Even one devious step would be attended with inconvenience in the recovery—two would create serious difficulty; a few misdirected steps would altogether bewilder the adventurer in the dark. The vigilance with which the Roman sentinels performed duty is proverbial in history, and may be inferred from our narrative. It was a Roman maxim, "Better for ninety and nine loyal subjects to suffer death, than for one guilty rebel to escape." The Evangelist informs us, that as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers as to what was become of Peter. Their lives were at

stake: and Peter not being found, the whole garrison, at the command of Herod, was put to death. What, than this economy, can more forcibly impress the mind with the anxious interest felt by unbelief and pride, and by every other dark subaltern, in the recapture and re-entanglement of every converted man? Their very existence is in the issue. What, then, in the absence of Divine counsel, or with a heedless ear to its monition, can await the recently-converted man, but heavier chains and a more guarded bondage? A stranger to the perverted moral structure of an evil world—a stranger to the position and relative connection of its wards—a world where every avenue is studded with points—where the footsteps are complex in their courses—where a few misdirected steps bewilder the walk beyond the power of extrication. “Strait is the gate,” said our Lord, “and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”* Now this view need not dishearten the converted man, nor afford discouragement to the sinner to repent and be converted; but it establishes what our text illustrates—the necessity of Divine counsel, and on the part of man, of an open ear and an obedient heart to this counsel. He whose power delivers, alone has wisdom to instruct; and under that instruction, and preceded by his deliverer, the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. “Thy word,” says David, “is a lantern unto my feet, and a light unto my paths.”† The ungodly have laid a snare for me, but yet I swerved not from Thy commandments. “The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”‡ His call, indeed, to every devious step is, “Return unto me.” He pours

* Matt. vii. 14.

† Ps. cxix. 105.

‡ Ps. xlv. 7.

the healing oil also into every wound which the false step has made, and imparts fresh counsels to walk in the way of life. The wiles of Satan permitted, and our ignorance of them render these counsels indispensable to security, as does also our ignorance of the perverted moral structure of an evil world—of its contiguous wards, its bristled avenues, its complex footsteps.

What then are the Divine counsels to the converted man? “And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals.” Conversion to God, through the want of early religious culture, finds men in general but ill prepared to run with patience the race that is set before them. The unrenewed state, to its victim, is a time of spiritual stupefaction; but to the enemy it is a time of ceaseless activity. When the sinner wakes up he is found, both in mind and body, possessed of habits by no means reconcilable with a safe advance. We need only refer to the loose and flowing costume of Peter, and then to the pointed avenues through which he must necessarily pass, to conceive that either he must have previously adjusted his robe to the circumstances, or have unwarrantably tempted the angel to a needless exercise of miraculous power; but to tempt the delivering power to an unchartered act is forbidden. “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”* To impede or frustrate with incumbrances a divine deliverance is also forbidden: “Lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us.”† It follows that what the Apostle terms “a preparation of the Gospel of peace”‡—an equipment of the whole man for the service called for by the new circumstances in

* Matt. iv. 7.

† Heb. xii. 1.

‡ Eph. vi. 15.

which he is placed, is the only wise, as it is the only lawful alternative. "And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself." The same counsel was given by our Lord to his disciples: "Let your loins be girded about."* St. Peter urges the same counsel upon converted men: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind."† And St. Paul, to the same injunction, adds a reason for the thing: "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil: stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth." The phrase, "Gird thyself," implies an habitual state of preparation for any service, and for the consequences of any service which God may require of us. We do not know what this service may be. No man can tell in what line of approach, or in what mode of attack a wily adversary may assault him. But if the mind be girt about with the simplicity and integrity of truth; if the heart be ennobled with a right and ready faith, we are prepared for any assault of Satan. The man finds himself able to stand, and he stands therefore. The phrase in question was applied to soldiers engaged in hazardous enterprises, which required a state of disengagement from all incumbrance, and that vigilance and readiness which catches, and promptly executes, the intimations given by the leader. It applied also to servants, when their masters reclined at table, and indicated the peculiar proprieties of their station—disentanglement, vigilance, readiness, activity. In its application to the converted man it indicates corresponding proprieties: he must lay aside the habitually careless, timid, and indolent habits of mind which pertained to his former state, which expose his soul to the in-

* Luke xii. 35.

† 1 Peter i. 13.

roads of the enemy, and virtually deny the wisdom and authority of his guide; but he must also bind on his sandals. "Gird thyself and bind on thy sandals." *Sandals* were a species of protective harness for the feet and ankles. In ordinary these were unbound and slipped off; but when the soldier was upon duty, and especially in that rude country, his feet and ankles were well protected and sustained by sandals. We need only recur to the avenues through which Peter must inevitably pass, to perceive the necessity of providing this defence. With exposed feet and ankles a single accident, and against which possibly no precaution could guard, might have arrested, at least, if not have terminated his course. What was remarked under the first injunction will apply here. We must not tempt a delivering power—we must not unnecessarily hazard our course. It follows, we must use all reasonable precaution against offence or hinderance. As the Apostle expresses it, "our feet must be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." The unconverted man is found in the pointed avenues of life, exposed to all the sensitiveness of unmortified pride, while his dominant unbelief has denied his mind a single preparation of the Gospel of peace. A melancholy consequence is, that innumerable accidents, unavoidable in a world like this, and against which the sandals of the Gospel would have proved a competent defence, gall his feelings and render him unhappy in himself and injurious to all around him. We compassionate the man who, deaf to Divine counsel, or regardless of its monition, has set out upon his Christian course unshod with the peculiar preparation of the peaceful Gospel. He may now, indeed, be running with the youths; but we may expect ere long to see his naked feet suddenly plunged among

broken rocks and angular projections, and if he escape with life in his soul, he may learn the source of his deliverance by reading the merciful address of his Redeemer to Simon: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."* Yes, when this man is unmindful of himself, and prayerless, his Redeemer is mindful of him, and prays for him, that his faith fail not. He must now be taught by his own experience what he refused to hear from an angel's mouth: "Bind on thy sandals." Or, from an Apostle's mouth: "Have your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." He may then gratefully and quietly and diligently pursue his Christian course, and follow his leader safely over pointed and dangerous ground. It is edifying to contemplate the attentive ear and submissive spirit of Peter under Divine instruction. So he did, says the Evangelist; "He girded himself and bound on his sandals;" not a word of argument—all obedience. But as instruction, to be useful and efficient, must keep pace with obedience, the angel proceeds in his address to Peter: "Cast thy garment about thee and follow me." Garments, amongst other uses, are outward and public badges of distinction. In Scripture usage, therefore, the garment is metaphorically employed to denote the public profession of the Gospel. The Gospel deliverance is not a thing done in darkness or in a corner, neither is its light to be put under a bushel, but to be set in a candlestick to be seen of all men and to profit all men. God is not ashamed of this great work of deliverance; it is termed "his glory in the face of Jesus Christ."†

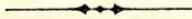
* Luke xxii. 31.

† 2 Cor. iv. 6.

No, it pertains to an evil world, oppressed by the devil and all his works, to be ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Even when the unbelief of the sinner gives way, his pride would make a night-work of deliverance. His interviews with Christ are in a corner and under cover of darkness. We need only to recur to the sentinels posted along the avenues, to conclude that to put on the distinctive garment of a freeman, and to walk out between sentinels, in his proper person, under the light, calmly, openly, and undisguised, his leader invisible, himself only seen, were injunctions laid upon Peter, not reconcilable upon ordinary principles with his notions either of expediency or safety. Nothing is more common than for maxims of human prudence to step in between Divine injunction, and human obedience; but the converted man should know that the Gospel has stripped the world of half its power. The light which shines upon him, shines also upon the unconverted. The smitings which he feels, and under which he acts, the world has long felt. Its repugnance to his manumission is the repugnance of pride, not of conscience; to this latter there lies a safe appeal: though, in co-operating with God, he must condemn their folly. "Put on," says the Apostle, "the Lord Jesus Christ."* This is the distinctive garment of the converted man, assumed in baptism, and for ever to be worn. As many of you as are baptized into Christ—that is, have made an open, unequivocal, sacramental profession of the Gospel, and in its power—have put on Christ. O! what invaluable qualifications are those which the Deliverer inspires by His blessed Spirit, and which it is the inestimable privilege of the Christian

* Gal. iii. 27.

to put on for his security! And Peter did so: he put on his garment, went out, and followed his deliverer—the one leading by sight, the other following by faith, till they reached the iron gate which leadeth unto the city. And so always it may be with the Christian man. The light of yesterday is the light of to-day. The redeeming power is an instructing and guiding power; and if followed in the submissive spirit of Peter, will infallibly conduct him through all the mazes of an intricate world, over all its obstructions, and bring him more than conqueror to the gate of death: nor will the guide here forsake him; as the angel never forsook his charge till safely ushered into the city; so, in whatever circumstances placed, whether this side or beyond the grave, the humble trusting spirit need fear no evil. O! blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city!



SERMON XXIII.

THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED IN REST.

“But ye are come, to the spirits of just men made perfect.”—Heb. xii. 23.

THAT it is appointed unto all men once to die, is one of those humiliating truths announced by Scripture, which is confirmed to us in the afflicting experience of human life. Our own time of death is a set time; our own months are numbered, our own days are determined. Were we permitted to glance into the Divine

counsels, we should there read the day and the hour when the weariness and pain to which our bodies are now subjected, shall be exchanged for the loathsomeness and dust of the grave. We should read also the appointed time when all those interesting forms which now move around us—the goodly frames of our children now so dear to us—of our parents so revered—of our friends and neighbors so highly esteemed—under a humiliating process shall mingle with the clods, or be given as the sport of the winds. But one of the most affecting truths which relate to the death of the body is its penal character. Unmindful of Scripture, we often err on this important point. We accustom our minds to think of death as of something within the order of nature; as a thing in course, as a part of the original portion and destination of our race. We thus endeavor, however unconsciously to ourselves, to veil our shame under a false idea. But the voice of Scripture remains the same, which assures our faith that we became mortal only, when we became sinful. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”* When we see the shrouded corpse therefore, or the open grave greedy of its victim, let us not impeach the order of nature, or charge God wrongfully. Let us rather exclaim, Behold the wages of sin. Yes, that havoc, and often among objects so dear to us, is the work of man’s apostasy from God. Dust he was, indeed, for out of it his body was moulded by a plastic hand; but it was not until he became rebellious, that the sentence went forth: “Unto dust shalt thou return.”†

* Rom. v. 12.

† Gen. iii. 19.

From these humiliating views of death, however, the Gospel would lift our vision to higher and more ennobling features in the economy of grace. If the death of the body declares the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the soul, if sanctified, will be saved, to the praise of our Redeemer, and, in reunion with a glorious and incorruptible body, will shine forth in the heavens, the bright monument there, of unsearchable mercy. Of these glorious events, which are destined to transpire in the case of every humble believer, our present Church state, if duly appreciated, is the incipient stage and pledge. It would seem to be the design of the Apostle, in that divinely eloquent sketch he gives of the Christian privilege, and of which our text is a part, to incite the members of the Church, who now occupy the present sphere, to corresponding holiness of life; without which he assures us the privilege we now enjoy will but increase our condemnation. Great indeed, and glorious and awful, is the dispensation under which we live; and by no means the less so, because, unlike to a former dispensation, the tokens of the Divine presence are no longer overpowering in their manifestation, but apprehended only by faith. The city of the Living God, to which, as Christians, we have come, and into which our baptism has translated us, is tenanted, as the Apostle assures us, not merely by such beings as we now find ourselves to be, with vile bodies, and consequently beings full of frailty and imperfection—beings occupying, as we now do, the lower room in the palace of the great King, and with conscious unworthiness gathering to our emaciated spirits the crumbs which fall from the Heavenly Feast—but this Holy City is inhabited also by higher orders of intelligences, and among these we find enumerated “the

spirits of just men made perfect." These justified spirits, now made perfect in holiness and happiness, at least so far as consists with the separate state in which they await the redemption of the body, are under the same roof with ourselves, though in a higher department of the Father's house. Death, it appears, has not separated them from the Church, nor from its communion; nor from our fellowship or affection, but elevated them in the enjoyment of privilege. They fill a position now, which in its properties is as yet unknown to us, or known only as but a taste of the heavenly gift. When the Scriptures refer to this state, on which so many of our departed friends, as we humbly trust, have entered, they describe it as a rest which remaineth for the now militant people of God.* And perhaps the best turn we can give to our discourse is to bring the circumstances of this intermediate state into contrast with those of the present, and then derive from the whole the motive to follow peace with all men and holiness, which it would seem to be within the drift of the Apostle's argument to set before us.

We say the Scriptures describe the state implied in our text, as one of rest. It is an intermediate state, on one side of which the people of God are found in a course of trial and discipline; and on the other, they will be found reunited to the body, and in a course of glorious and most vigorous activity in the service of the great King. The angelical host, as they need no rest, so they know of none. And when the perfected spirits of the just are clothed upon with their incorruptible attire, they will pass from that state of which "rest" is the characteristic, into one of which it is af-

* Heb. iv. 9.

firmed its occupants "are as the angels in Heaven."* They rest not day nor night. There can be no exhaustion created in those sublime occupations and pursuits, and consequently no sense of weariness, no indisposition of mind or of body can be perceived by them or felt. All is worthy of God, all is immortal. We ought never to lose sight of these three conjoined aspects of our existence. The moment we close our eyes upon the state of rest in prospect, or the state of glorious and inspiring activity beyond it—which now, in the lively anticipation, so eminently serve to qualify the allotments of the present life—we become unfitted for the place we now occupy and exposed to innumerable evils.

Why is it, that so many who name the name of Christ, are found, as the Apostle expresses it, "warring after the flesh?"† Not merely restless, discontented, and unhappy in themselves; but void of consideration or forbearance in relation to others. They have no practical view, no abiding impression of the nature and end of this threshold of their spiritual existence on which they have entered. They expect from this low place what they will never realize. Neither can they endure chastisement in the spirit and affection of one whose hope of "rest" is fixed on a step higher in the scale of happiness. They become the victims of drooping hearts, or of cold displeasures; disappointment embitters their peace; they are fretted by the imperfections of beings around them. They practically disregard what the Scriptures teach, that "man is born to trouble;"‡ that the just can here live by faith only; that tribulation is the appointed avenue through which we enter on our rest.

* Luke xx. 36.

† 2 Cor. x. 3.

‡ Job v. 7.

Now it is worthy of remark, that "rest" is affirmed of the intermediate state, not merely with reference to the glorious activity which is to ensue, but with special reference to the conflicts and toils which characterize this lower abode. The immediate blessedness of the dead, who die in the Lord, consists in a rest from the labors here assigned them, under whatever aspect these labors or trials may be considered. Not but that the third Heaven, with its illimitable prospects of glory and felicitous activity, awaits the perfection of their nature, and enkindles the liveliest anticipations of joy; but the first impressions of the disembodied spirit would seem to refer more particularly to what had here been encountered, and here overcome by the blood of the Lamb. It would seem to be the condition of the wrecked mariner, who, amidst imminent hazards and painful endurances, had reached the shore. All his immediate feelings are retrospective; while in the consciousness of deliverance, and in the positive enjoyment of simple rest, his nature, at least for the present, is sufficiently joyous.

Now one aspect of present trial is, that we have to deplore many errors and many frailties into which, and amidst the best vigilance of which we are capable, we are sometimes drawn away and enticed. We are assailed by temptations for which it has happened we were not prepared, and not unfrequently fall from our steadfastness—some in one line of disobedience, and some in another. Sin is thus created; and where sin is, there is the root of misery. When our Lord taught his people to pray, he inserted in that admirable prayer a petition for the forgiveness of their sins. This alone speaks a volume, and shows us what an Apostle declares, that "if we say we have no sin, we deceive our-

selves, and the truth is not in us.”* Such declarations are not intended to abate our vigilance against the enemy or our conflict with corruption, but to inculcate on our minds the fundamental truth, that our nature is perfected, not in virtue of any attainments in spiritual excellence of which we are here capable, though herein we are both to strive for the mastery and to strive lawfully, but in virtue of the blood and intercession of our Redeemer. “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”† Except in that offering there is no hope—no reasonable, no scriptural hope—even for those who have made the greatest advances in spiritual virtue; and the best evidence of our interest in that offering may be derived from this experience, that our sinfulness is the felt burden of our spirits.

But in the intermediate state, the spirit of the just, or justified man, is quickened and elevated by higher and more heavenly revelations. He realizes what he here sincerely desired, prayed for, aimed for, contended for manfully, though but in part successfully. All the circumstances of that state are favorable to the holiness which the spirit there possesses. That spirit is delivered from the burden of the flesh. This is a signal deliverance. The flesh lusteth against the spirit, even in them that are regenerate. Its motions generate spiritual disease. Its dominion is death. Under the most successful form of subjugation, it requires unabated vigilance; is not merely to be put down, but to be kept under, to be denied even within the limits of lawful gratification, to be crucified in all its distinctive affections and lusts. But, in the intermediate state,

* 1 John i. 8.

† Heb. x. 14.

flesh and blood are denied an entrance, as incompatible either with the holiness of the spirit or with the rest there assigned her. All the temptations proceeding from this source are necessarily excluded with their cause: neither can the temptations of the world find admission there. All that pride and arrogance of thought which the world has inspired; all those false estimations which have so generally obtained; all that vain pageantry and hollow pretension; all those exaggerated sentiments and conventional deceptions, which have corrupted the simplicity of truth, and veiled their victim with dissimulation, lies, and hypocrisy; all these things are excluded: we are there delivered from the region of their sway, as well as from those peculiar temptations under which we were often betrayed and wounded in our peace. Neither can the temptations of the devil find admission there. All, and every modification whatever of envy, hatred, malice, or of any form of uncharitableness; all incitements to calumny and detraction; all and every form of evil speaking, misrepresentation, or of slanderous imputation; all pride of opposition to spiritual authority, all jealousy of its exhibitions, all secret exultation in its overthrow; in a word, all that poisonous inspiration from the Evil One under which the earth has groaned, and its inhabitants have withered as under a blight, will gain no access there. In like manner will be excluded, as no longer required, all kinds and degrees of affliction. Pains of body cease with the body itself, and mental anguish is unknown to a place where the Spirit of holiness exercises an uncontested mastery. The conscience will no longer be visited with remorse, nor the soul shudder under apprehensions for the future. In the present state the justified man needs to be exercised

with a painful course of trial and trouble. Of whatever excellent attainment his spirit is here susceptible, this is ordinarily reached only through the furnace of affliction. In this way our Leader and Pattern was perfected, and how infinitely more must not the justified man need this discipline.

There is a spiritual pollution in the soul which needs to be burnt out, under a fiery trial, before that soul can take its due place among the lowly, contrite, affectionate followers of the Lamb. To become a servant of the crucified Jesus implies a spiritual elevation of soul, a victory over the world, to which it is to be feared but a little flock of the great body of professing Christians ever attain; yet this attainment is to be desired, to be prayed for earnestly, perseveringly, on whatever terms it is to be had. This, in reality, is the pearl of great price, and is to be had only at the sacrifice of every counter consideration. The very title under which the intermediate state is known in Scripture—we mean "*a rest*"—would seem to imply, that very arduous and severe struggles had been encountered here, and such only as could be overcome "by the blood of the Lamb."* But in that blessed state, be the fiery trial here however severe, however agonizing its flame, it is all over. "The wicked cease from troubling, the weary are at rest."† All sorrows have ceased, all tears are wiped from the eye, the once suffering Christian is contemplated by faith, refined in spirit as gold is refined, made perfect, "shining forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."‡ Now it has been our care not to force or overstrain any of these thoughts beyond their scriptural measure. If now jus-

* Rev. vii. 14.

† Job iii. 17.

‡ Matt. xiii. 43.

tified by our faith, and laboring to enter into that rest; if now truly humbled under the many imperfections and frailties which cleave to our flesh, and through the flesh defile the soul; if now truly penitent under our sins, and believing, being led by the Spirit, and submitting ourselves to be sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God, we shall not be disappointed in our hope; we shall most assuredly enter upon that on which so many endeared to our remembrance have entered, for it is promised, and, what is more, it is but one step above the ground we now occupy; just as sure as we now occupy the lower department of the Church, and aim to approve our fidelity there as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, so sure, when delivered from the burden of the flesh, shall we be called up higher. It is infinitely more a mystery that, in a world like this, we should have been born again and incorporated into Christ's mystical body, than that, having been so born and so incorporated, we should after death enter into another department of his kingdom. More has been done for us here than need be done again. The offering once made is as effectual for the whole as for any part thereof, and if now humbled down into the spirit and obedience of a true service, we shall be exalted in due time to a habitation of rest. In this view of our exalted privilege the Apostle perceived a motive to follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. If we hope to mingle and blend with many spirits in our appointed seat of rest, then let us be careful that the points on which we now differ from them be not perverted into an occasion of the flesh. The imperfection implied in differing may be in us, or it may be in them, or it may be with both. Let us console ourselves

with the belief that, when delivered from the burden of the flesh, and raised up together, and made to sit together in a more heavenly place, we shall see with them eye to eye, and with one heart and with one mind enjoy our portion of peace. Differences among men are not necessarily evils in themselves; they become so only when out of them a root of bitterness springs up and becomes a fruitful source of trouble to ourselves and of defilement to others. The consideration of a place of rest but one step above the Church militant, and on which we shall presently enter and join our departed friends, should be allowed also its proper influence on our spirit and behavior under the course of discipline through which the Spirit is now conducting us. Under all these tribulations we should be patient, for at most they are of but short duration; we should be cheerful, for a rest is before us; we should be thankful, for these trials work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: what is more, we suffer no new things. If we look into the world of spirits and survey that host who now calmly repose in Jesus, and then turn to their histories and read what this one endured, and how that one was exercised, and these, too, the best of men and the best of women, of whom the world was not worthy; if from this view we turn to ourselves, and to the comparatively light and momentary afflictions which are permitted to cross our path, O how should we not blush to be found before God otherwise than patient, cheerful, thankful sufferers! How should we not blush that before God should at any time appear a root of bitterness in our hearts, with its frosty progeny, alienating kindred from kindred, and friend from friend! Merciful Parent, how are these warriors after the flesh to rest together?

How are they to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and with men who were not moved by all the power which earth and hell could array, but were followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises? O let us wake from sleep; let us arise from death; let the quiet lustre of the invisible kingdom of glory beam upon our hearts and reflect there the image of Christ, from glory to glory, as by his blessed Spirit, which changeth all things unto himself.

SERMON XXIV.

THE CHURCH STATE A PROBATION.

“For many are called, but few are chosen.”—St. Matt. xxii. 14.

THESE words are supplementary to two of the parables spoken by our Lord: the parables of the Householder and of the Great Supper. They refer to the great day of account, when the improvement or perversion of Church privilege will be made manifest to all. It would seem, then, that Church membership, however valuable a privilege, is of itself inconclusive as to its gracious design. Many will be called; many will accept the call; many will be received into the Church, and share with the Church in all her external advantages, who, nevertheless, will fall short of the grand election. In the day when the secrets of all hearts will be judged, it will appear that they here lived the victims of self-delusion. To impress our minds with the sense of so awful danger, our Lord, in the close of

the parable, transfers the scene from the present state, where Church privilege had been conferred on the many, to the tribunal of the great day, when character and fitness will be passed upon, not as they are now, by mere outward indications, but by the secret counsels of the heart—by those inward interests and purposes, aims and ends, which, however veiled from the eyes of others, and even from our own, yet determine the quality of our Church membership in the sight of our Judge. This scene of judicial scrutiny is thus pictured by our Lord: “And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? and he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* We can scarcely conceive of a more impressive admonition than is here conveyed to the members of the Church in all subsequent ages. The first and most obvious lesson it teaches is the probationary character of the Church state. This is a talent intrusted to our care, on the improvement of which to the Divine glory, and not on the talent itself, our final acceptance will be made to depend. The incipient benefits of the Church state pertain to the life which now is. We are said to have been translated from darkness into the Kingdom of God’s dear Son.† Here Divine light is afforded to the understanding—the will is divinely persuaded—the heart is divinely seasoned with grace; and here also authoritative demands are made on the conscience. The in-

* Matt. xxii. 11–13.

† Col. i. 13.

spired writers every where appreciate such benefits, involved in this talent of Church membership, or the election of grace. St. Paul terms it "fellow-citizenship with the saints, and of the household of God."* We occupy the identical position, breathe the same atmosphere, and are laid open to the same genial influences under which the saints of God, who have finished their course with joy, attained to the heavenly crown. Our enlightenment, both in kind and degree, was once the illumination of their souls. Our persuasions are those which determined their wills; the seasonings of the heart we enjoy were once their enrichment; our conflicts are those in which they once struggled; their consciences were awed by those same authoritative exactments which are now made upon our own;—in a word, our present state is a "fellow-citizenship with the saints." We are members of the same Divine household, associated in one holy communion; the hopes, the aspirations are ours, which once cheered their bosoms and elevated their souls to God. Hence the Apostle terms the Church state, considered as a talent, "heavenly places in Christ,"† in opposition to those places from which our nature has been translated. We are said to be no longer debtors to the flesh, to walk after its incitements, having been freely emancipated from this degrading servitude, and subjected to new incitements and to new laws. And so independently of ourselves have these inestimable benefits been conferred upon us, that, not unlike to our existence, they have been forced on our acceptance. Our circumstances are not unlike to those of favored children, who come into being under the most felicitous

* Eph. ii. 19.

† Eph. i. 3.

combination of elements, where all their wants and apprehensions have been anticipated—where every provision has been made for their kind reception—who have been taken up by maternal hands, and their quivering lips made to embrace the teeming bosom of life and love. In exact agreement with such unconditional yet exalted privileges conferred upon us, our infancy has been gifted by inspiration with the most awful and glorious titles. We are called “the children of God;”* “members of Christ;”† “inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven;”‡ The grant of holy influences has overshadowed our being, so that it is affirmed of our bodies that they are “temples of the Holy Ghost,”§ and sharers in sanctification and honor.

The Church state is termed a state of salvation, into which God has called us, through the Gospel of His Son; and we have been taught to thank God for it heartily, and to be prayerful for grace to continue in it, which implies both a grateful recognition and a wise improvement of the gifts and bounties of grace. But all blessings of the Church state, so freely bestowed, make up but a talent, which, the Scriptures show, may or may not be improved to our souls' health and final acceptance with God. They, indeed, demonstrate the call of the many, but not the election of the few, in time of judgment. They are declarative of God's will in Christ Jesus concerning us, how that he would have all men to be saved, and to come to an experimental knowledge of the truth; but may be found, not unlike to a buried talent, in fatal severance from the mind and intent of the Redeemer in all these things. Hence, the second lesson our admonitory text teaches

* Eph. v. 1. † 1 Cor. vi. 15. ‡ Rom. viii. 17. § 1 Cor. vi. 19.

is the startling truth, that the issue, in the case of the one man called, as pictured in the parable, will be the fatal issue realized by thousands in the judgment. Now mark the circumstances of that one man. He was a guest among guests. No higher privilege, under the settled laws of the Gospel, in peopling its realm existed, than that of which he himself was made a partaker. We may conceive him to have inherited his existence within the Christian colony on earth—to have been early incorporated into the heavenly places in Christ—to have been known under awful and glorious titles—to have been emancipated from his natural debtorship to the world and the flesh, and under no allegiance whatever to their unholy domination. What is more, we may conceive this man to have been nurtured under Christian admonition, on Christian principles, and in riper years to have confirmed all which by sponsorship had engaged his faith and obedience, and thenceforth to have been admitted with many to the mystery of a heavenly communion. From any thing which appears to the contrary, we have no reason to believe that the character of the man portrayed in our parable was ever impugned. It was the king only who could accurately discern the qualifications on which his acceptance would turn. It is said, “he there saw a man which had not on a wedding garment.” This is the first intimation we have of the real state of this man. In all other respects, he may have been so conformed to the many around him, that charity, which hopeth all things, would have closed her ear and turned away from any disparaging imputations laid at his door. As he had lived, so it appears he died, in outward communion with the Church; but his end disclosed the fact, that names, rather than things, had ab-

sorbed his attention and zeal. His concerns had been rather with the observance of outward and visible signs, than with the experience of inward and spiritual realities. His faith had never approved its certainty, either in purifying his heart or in overcoming the world. His hope was founded rather in the occupancy, than in the improvement of the Church state: it was, therefore, neither reasonable in itself, religious, nor holy. It perished in the judgment, aye at the very juncture when its foundation most needed to be sustained. It would seem, in the case of this man, which our text forewarns will be the case of many, it was destined for judgment only to unveil his deep-wrought infidelity to the trust assigned him. The authoritative voice of his judge, which awed his presuming confidence, awakened the first painful misgiving. Every delusive refuge, on which a deceived heart had been accustomed to repose, was swept away: it is said, "he was speechless." We may remark, that the fate of the wicked and slothful servant, who, under various pretences, had buried his lord's money, is described in the very same language as records the doom of the speechless guest. Both were severed from their inestimable privileges in a manner as forcible and as independently of themselves, as, in the first instance, these privileges had been conferred upon them. Both were cast into outer darkness, where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. How affecting, then, the thought, that what is here pictured of one man, must and will be realized by many! For many are called to the possession and enjoyment of the Church state, but few will be the final elect of God—few the good and faithful servants who have improved the trust committed to them! Hence a third lesson which our text inculcates is, the

necessity for seriousness and whole-heartedness for the wise using of our Church state. An outwardness in religion, however exalted, however imposing in appearance, will avail us nothing. The Scriptures are every where full of warning on this point, lest any of us should fall short of the mind and intent of the Gospel. We see how little it availed Cain to have been invested with primogeniture. We see how little it availed Ham to have inhabited the ark. We see how little it availed the many to have been called out of Egypt—to have been baptized in the cloud and in the sea—to have eaten the spiritual bread, and to have drunk the spiritual drink; so few were the ultimate elect of the good land, that their names are recorded, and a cipher sums them? We see how little it availed Judas to have been numbered with the Apostles; how little it availed Capernaum to have been exalted into heaven. Every where, and in every variety of form, are we admonished not to confound the occupancy of high ground with the improvement of it, nor to repose on the one, while by the other only the certainty of our faith and the reasonableness of our hope are attested. “Baptism, indeed, doth now save us;”^{*} but it is not the bodily washing in which the “saving” consists, but the response of the heart and mind to the heavenly endowment there imparted; not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience before God. The former, indeed, may confer a positive benefit, as Ham in the ark was delivered from the flood; but a temporal benefit, though included in the grant, falls infinitely short of the intent and meaning of the Church state. Let us be convinced

* 1 Pet. iii. 21.

there is meaning in such scriptures as these: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."* The words import a gradual transformation, by the renewing of our minds and the purifying of our hearts. So also there are scriptures which import the habitual control of faith manifested in holy living, whether in active obedience or in patient endurance: "The life which I now live in the flesh," says an Apostle, "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."† How different this life from that controlled by the maxims and policy of the world around us! Yet there are scriptures which import, that this holy living, on the part of His people, was comprehended within the intent of the immaculate oblation upon the cross. "Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God our Father."‡ Surely we should be led to serious inquiry into the progress of this spiritual work—how far the invisible power has delivered us from the fellowship and communion of the many—from that peculiar domination by which so many of the called are yet enslaved and polluted—from those sinful pleasures, by which so many of the called are yet ensnared and impoverished in all that concerns the soul—from those depressing miseries of the heart, under which so many of the called are yet distracted. Hear also what our Lord Jesus Christ saith: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me."§ O let us be assured, it is no intermitting vigilance—it is no languid prayer—no withered exertion,

* 2 Cor. v. 17.

† Gal. ii. 20.

‡ Gal. i. 4.

§ Matt. xvi. 24.

that will ever number our spirits with the elect of God in the eternal Kingdom of His glory. Eternal life, indeed, is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord; but it will be awarded with discrimination: The prize will be given to him only whose chief aim it was to gain it; who lived for it; who wrought for it by day and by night; who suffered for it patiently; whose one desire of the heart it was; by which all other desires were put under rule. Our text gives all needful assurance that infidelity to trustship will find no favor nor commutation there. Nor shall we wonder at this, if we look into the history of our redemption. There is something in that holy mystery besides words which attests the fidelity of the Son of God to the work assigned Him. We read of the "marks of the Lord Jesus;"* of wounds in His hands; of the print of nails in His feet; of thrusts into the side; of thorns platted by the many, and fixed upon His brow. We read of cold neglect—desertion—contempt spit upon His person. We, indeed, need not aim to appropriate to ourselves, in the letter, these marks of the Lord Jesus; but when, under some form, have they not met the Christian in his path, and when, but at the peril of the soul, have they been evaded by him? Surely we need something of these marks to attest the straitness of the gate through which we have entered, and the narrowness of the way which we assiduously pursue—something of wounds in our hands for Christ's sake—something of the prints of nails in our feet—a thrust, at least, into our side—some standing symbol of the world's derision and contempt. O what have not the elect of God accomplished in the work assigned them!

* Gal. vi. 17.

What have they not patiently endured! How have they not borne upon their bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus—the symbols of communion with His spirit, and of fellowship in His sufferings, and of sympathy in His death! How have the many that were called escaped all these things? May not the secret of their success be disclosed in the wideness of the gate through which the Church state has been entered by them, and the broadness of the way which they now pursue? How needful, then, to such is the wholesome instruction of the text, that the religion of the many is not that which will insure the approbation and acceptance of their Judge. Its cry, indeed, is Lord, Lord. It has eaten and drunk in His presence. It has skimmed the surface of the great deep; but, unlike to truth as it is in Jesus, it has never penetrated into the depths where the soul resides, nor fastened on the interior man, nor wrought a new creation, where no eye but that of God can explore. True religion, the religion which saves the soul, is universally a religion of suffering in many things. As it actually endures many things, so, in fidelity to its trust, it is prepared to endure all things. It is a strait gate, into which the many will never enter; it is a narrow way, and few there be that find it.

To conclude: What is true of the whole body of the Church, is true of every part or section thereof. "Many are called; few are chosen." What is more, the religion of the few will minister to the condemnation of the many, as the righteousness of Noah condemned the world. It will evidence the excellency of the truth as it is in Jesus, and show how practicable a thing it was, under the grace of the Gospel, to fall in with the mind and intention of their Redeemer in the trust reposed. They will evidence to the condemnation of the many, that

goodness and fidelity in a steward, were no unreasonable requirements in the service of One, who loved him and gave Himself for him. The presumption of the many is, that having secured their ends in this world, they look still to another for their remuneration. But verily, said our Lord, they have their reward.* And shall any among ourselves sleep away their probation, under these day-dreams of a roving heart? Shall it be reserved for judgment alone to disperse the illusion? Wherein, may we not ask, Wherein do we differ from the many that are called? What has religion done for us, which a regard for worldly reputation, or the preservation of worldly interests, or respect for the forms of society, has not done for thousands? Wherein does our righteousness exceed the righteousness of these Scribes and Pharisees? Surely it must be our wisdom, beloved friends, to look well into this matter. Too late will it be when the King shall come in to see the guests—when the judgment is set, and the records unrolled; and the eye of the Judge, like a flame of fire, shall wither into less than nothing and vanity every unfounded hope, every delusive refuge of an evasive heart! O! let us be wise; let us understand this; let us consider our latter end. Let us daily anticipate the judgment of the great day by faithful self-examination, and be reasonably assured that we now possess, and shall carry to the tribunal of the Great King, under the working of grace, a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man.

* Matt. vi. 2.

SERMON XXV.

THE PEACE OF GOD BY WAY OF OBEDIENCE.

“And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”—Phil. iv. 7.

By the peace of God, we may understand a comfortable sense of our reconciliation with God, through the mediation of Christ. This peace is not to be confounded with that commonplace state of mind, which shows itself calm and composed indeed, but which is very far from the peace referred to in our text. As some men are cheerful, simply because they fear nothing; and others generous or liberal, because what they give is not their own; and others large and unifying, because they have no principles and no opinions; so others may be found who are dispassionate, simply on the ground that they feel nothing. Neither is the peace of God to be confounded with a show of external evenness and composure, while the whole interior is but a scene of troubled waters which covertly cast up mire and dirt. There are master passions, which, for the time and seemingly at least, have conquered and subdued all others; and the world abounds with men, who, on principles of worldly expediency and of subserviency to ambitious ends, are kind, gentle, forbearing, courteous, unassuming. We are not to believe every spirit which assumes the air and complexion of the true. There is not a grace of the Spirit which has not its counterfeit, and it is a property of Christian vigilance to try these showy appearances, and to afford us reasonable assurance, that our hearts are not deceived.

“He that doeth truth,” said our Lord, that is, has no disposition to deceive himself or others, but is sincerely desirous to be approved of God, “cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.”* The peace spoken of by the Apostle is the gift of God, procured for us through Jesus Christ, and is wrought in us by the Holy Spirit. If we look into the context, we shall discover that we are not passive in its reception, but can expect it only in the way of Christian obedience. “Rejoice in the Lord always. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing, but in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.”† Then follows the text, in the form of an inspired assurance: “And the peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” As true peace, therefore, is the gift of God through Christ, and passeth understanding, we may have that to attest itself in our own happy experience—let us rather look into the prescribed means of attaining to this invaluable possession. And first, it is enjoined upon us with singular emphasis, that our interest in Christ, and assurance of God’s favor and acceptance through Him, should become the ground and pillar of our equanimity. “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.” The importance of this precept may be inferred from our common experience, of the uncertainty and instability of all other grounds of rejoicing. We once rejoiced in our youth, and our hearts cheered us in our youth; but where now is that youthful period of existence, with its pecu-

* John iii. 21.

† Phil. iv. 4, 5, 6.

liar exhilarations? How has it not passed off as a dream of shadows! How has it not been succeeded by occasions of disappointment, mortification and sorrows, leaving behind a cruel conviction of the vanity and vexation of spirit which have marked all our preceding days! Some have rejoiced in their accumulated stores of wealth, the solidity and seeming security of which had mocked all that inspiration had recorded of the precarious tenure by which it was held. Some have rejoiced in the eminence of their earthly stations, or in the brilliancy of earthly honor, which had adorned their brows. Some have rejoiced in the opening prospects which have bloomed upon their families. And, indeed, it were endless to enumerate the grounds of rejoicing, which have raised but to disappoint our liveliest hopes, or have lifted a sparkling cup which untasted, or tasted but for a moment, has been dashed from our lips. The required equanimity implied in rejoicing always, and to which the peace of God is assured, cannot spring from sources so precarious in their nature. We do not say that earthly good is to be rejected or despised; but it is wise to hold it, if held at all, with a loose hand. It is wise to have it, if had at all, as though we had it not. Earthly good is given of God, but to be taken away of God, or we ourselves to be taken from it. A separation is decreed, and must and will take place; and it is the lively anticipation of this truth which, under the Spirit, is best calculated to chasten the joys of prosperous fortune. But when our rejoicing always is in the Lord, when our minds are stayed upon that hope which maketh not ashamed, never disappoints, never mortifies, never vexes the soul, then only are we prepared to pass with safety through the waves of this troublesome world. Ex-

traordinary trials may produce extraordinary commotions. But after all, it is the surface of the man only which is moved. The heart and mind are kept by the peace of God. The great depths of the soul are as tranquil and as silent in the storm as in a calm. There is within these depths a well of peace springing up, with which the world meddleth not, and the stream whereof maketh the soul glad, even amidst her outward tribulations and inward fears.

Again: Would we, by happy experience, enjoy something of the peace of God, then our "moderation must be made known unto all men." By "moderation," we may here understand our consideration, fairness and equitableness in our relative positions; in our dealings and intercourse with others, and especially in our estimation of those who differ from us in opinion or practice, or whose interests and pursuits may conflict with our own. And this moderation must be known unto all men; in other words it must give us what we term character. We must be generally known, as far as we are known, as moderate men, men of consideration, men who respect the rights and privileges and reasonable expectations of others; men, who, if they must err, choose to err on that side, in which they themselves will constitute the party aggrieved. The motive is annexed to the precept. "The Lord is at hand." Death is not far off; the Judge is at the door; and a consideration of these most certain truths, should relax the intensity of earthly feeling, pursuit and occupation. There are men who feel keenly in earthly matters; have strong earthly interests one way or other; and so far are morally disqualified to exhibit Christian moderation. Far from having established a reputation as moderate men, their repute is quite

another way. They are known of all men as partisans whose zeal surpasses their knowledge; men of ardent hopes, supremely sensitive on many points of mere transient importance. How persons of this intemperate earthly-mindedness are to inherit the peace of God, and to be kept by that peace in their hearts and minds, we are unable to say. Certain it is, that by no warrant of Scripture is the expectation justified. That peace is assured to the man only of a contrary character; to the man whose earthly sensibilities have been tempered by habitual considerations of death and judgment; whose mind is free to look on things dispassionately, and to judge with candor; who is not insensible, indeed, to the inconsideration, neglect, or mortification he meets with, but can sustain these things with a due estimation of their worth.

Again: Would we open the way for the peace of God, and have happy experience in our hearts and minds of its protection and defence, we must be "careful for nothing." By this, we may understand a freedom from corroding anxieties, we are sometimes placed in circumstances where, if left to the instinctive workings of our own hearts, we should make ourselves miserable beyond endurance. In some instances these circumstances may be strictly providential. They have come upon us through a chain of events, in relation to which we could exercise no forecast and no controlling power. Such were the circumstances of the early disciples, when our Lord announced the expediency of His departure from them. Sorrow filled their hearts; they were greatly depressed under the apprehension of their loneliness and exposure. But our Lord intimates that the peace of God should be given them to keep their hearts and minds, and He enjoins upon them

to be careful for nothing. "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."* The assurance given by the Apostle in our text, was doubtless founded in this promise of our Lord, and in his own happy experience of its fulfilment. But in by far the larger number of instances, the occasions of our anxiety are in some way or other connected with our own imprudence. We have spoken indiscreetly, or have acted unadvisedly, and now we are placed in circumstances which, of themselves, are well calculated to elicit the most disquieting apprehensions. Some of these apprehensions may already have been realized, and others are fast coming upon us. But the rule holds good in this, as well as in the former instance. We are not to be over-solicitous, we are not to distract our hearts and minds, we are not to impair the springs of action by overcharging the mind with anxiety; a wiser and more excellent regimen is prescribed for us under any emergency in which we may be placed, that will certainly open the way for the admission of true peace to shield the heart and mind. Let us look into the course prescribed. "But in every thing," continues the Apostle, "that is, upon all occasions of painful disquietings, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Here both the duty and the manner of its performance are set before us. Our requests are to be made known unto God. A fair inference from which is, that the less we have to do with ourselves or others under these occasions of disquietude, the less we take thought or speak, the better. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble."† No mistake is greater, and

* John xiv. 27.

† Ps. xli. 1.

yet none more common, than the one here tacitly re-
 proved. We mean, ruminating on the occasions of our
 disquietude, or making them the hack topic of our
 communications with others. So far from securing to
 ourselves the peace of God, to keep our hearts and
 minds, we thereby but enhance the evils under which
 we suffer. "I held my tongue," says David, "and
 spake nothing. I kept silence, yea even from good
 words, but it was pain and grief to me."* "My heart
 was hot within me," the more I aimed to smother my
 grief, the more inflamed my heart became. "And
 while I was thus musing," turning over and over the oc-
 casion of my disquietude, "the fire kindled," my grief,
 which I had vainly endeavored to smother broke out
 into a paroxysm, "and at the last I spake with my
 tongue;" as soon as my emotion had subsided I made
 known my request unto God. And mark that request;
 for it best interprets the Apostle's expression, "The
 Lord is at hand," and shows what the request of a
 man under painful troublings ought to be, and how it
 opens the way for the peace of God. "Lord, let me
 know my end, and the number of my days, that I may
 be certified how long I have to live." Affect my heart
 with a lively apprehension of the shortness and uncer-
 tainty of human life; let me feel how short is the span
 of days allotted to trial and suffering, and the folly of
 vexing my soul with vain shadows that must so soon
 vanish away, no more for ever to appear. Yes, the
 time of trouble is short. "The Lord is at hand," death
 will soon close the scene of disappointment, vexation,
 and disquietude; and this truth, however common-
 place, needs be brought home to the heart and realiz-

* Ps. xxxix. 2.

ed there, ere we can expect, on Scripture ground, the peace of God to keep our hearts and minds. For what are our earthly anxieties, but so much evidence, that we realize not the shortness and uncertainty of human life, nor the need of occupying the heart and mind with higher concernments? "Make us, we beseech thee," prays the Church, "deeply sensible of the shortness and uncertainty of human life; and let thy Holy Spirit lead us through this vale of misery in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives."*

Hence our requests are to be made known unto God by prayer. We need pray for lively impressions of most certain truths; for heavenly influences to determine aright our hearts and minds; for mercy, so much needed by us, as blind, and guilty, and distracted sinners. All this tends to open the way for the peace of God to keep our hearts and minds. But more is required. Our requests are to be made known unto God, not only by prayer, but by supplication with thanksgiving. Supplication refers to judgments from which we would be delivered, or which we would have averted, and by "thanksgiving" we may here understand, both an acknowledgment of our desert, and a recognition of God's paternal hand in the chastenings we endure. Taken together, and they indicate a very gracious temper of mind, wrought by the Spirit, and which our Heavenly Parent will never fail to respect. And now we may see how the rule works. For when we lose sight of the true character of the world, as a vale of misery through which we are passing, and of our probationary term, which is but a span of days, we by necessary consequence become inordinately af-

* Visitation of the sick.

fectured towards earthly objects, and acutely sensitive to earthly interests, honors and pleasures. This inordinate affection inevitably brings with it a burden of anxiety and bitter restlessness. This burden, in reality, is God's natural judgment on our misplaced affection. And it would stop here, leaving us miserable and exposed to greater miseries; but the Spirit of Grace comes in, and through this judgment lightens our eyes that we sleep not in death; works faith in our hearts and inclines them to God, to whom, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, we make known our requests. The way being thus opened, God in His own time, for which we must patiently wait, sheds abroad His peace, and with it, His love in our hearts; gives us a comfortable sense of His favor and goodness towards us, and in it a defence to our hearts and minds against every assault. The vale of misery, indeed, remains the same. Its vexations and mortifications, like so many winds, continually pass over the broad expanse of life and agitate its surface; but the heart and mind are unmoved in their depths, being brooded over by the peace of God.

And now to apply what has been said. Do we rejoice in the Lord always? Is our well-assured interest in Christ the ground of our equanimity? Is our moderation known unto all men? Have we character and reputation among our fellows, though unsought for by us, for consideration, fairness, and equity; character formed within us, and sustained by the motive that the Lord is at hand—that life is very short, and death, and judgment, and eternity very near; and the whole earth, with all its concerns, of too little importance to create those strong interests and intense occupancy of thought and affection, which, by fixed laws, blind

the eye and pervert the judgment? Are we careful for nothing—provident, indeed, but not overcharged in heart with care—sitting loose to the world, and holding its matter with a yielding grasp? Do we make known our requests, forbearing to muse darkly over our griefs? Do we communicate with God by prayer for lively impressions of certain truths, for heavenly influences, and for mercy? and are our prayers accompanied with supplication to be spared, and with humble acknowledgment of our desert, and grateful recognition of God's paternal love in the chastisements we endure? Finally, having done all these things, do we feel and acknowledge that we are unprofitable servants, having done our duty only, and therefore expecting only, through Christ Jesus, the descending peace of God to keep our hearts and minds against the world and all its changes and chances—its likes and dislikes—its vexations and its blandishments—its praise and its defamation; looking habitually at the approaching crisis, when all these things will shrivel into less than nothing and vanity, and our interest alone in Christ shall be felt to be the joy, and consolation, and support of our souls? If these things be so, happy are ye. Thrice happy, though passing through a vale of misery!—thrice happy will ye be when agonizing in death!—thrice happy when arraigned in judgment!—thrice happy when ushered into the everlasting habitation, where the peace of God, which now passeth understanding, shall disclose to the soul the brightness of its glory and the fulness of its joy.

SERMON XXVI.

FAITH THE RULE OF CHRISTIAN LIVING.

“ For we walk by faith, not by sight.”—2 Cor. v. 7.

THE Scriptures furnish many marks by which the Christian may be distinguished from the world around him: among these the rule of conduct by which he is habitually influenced, is by far the most conclusive. The Christian walks by faith, the man of this world walks by sight. The one is moved by things which are not seen and eternal, the other by things which are seen and temporal. Hence, in the two cases, we need not wonder if men of like passions with each other, and, in many respects, conformed to each other, should, nevertheless, in some important respects, be found widely apart. Their rule of conduct being essentially different in nature and tendency, different results may be expected in the present life, in the hour of death, in the day of judgment, and in eternity. As the fruit-tree beareth fruit after its kind, so by settled laws will these two principles comprehended in our text, vary essentially in their legitimate results, whether considered in relation to the life that now is or to that which is to come. We may do well, then, to explain and illustrate these two principles in both these important respects; and first, in relation to the life that now is, the principle of faith may be thus defined: a firm assent wrought within the heart and mind on the authority of Divine Revelation. By a firm assent we mean an operative assent—an assent which determines the will, and begets a sincere obedience in the life and con-

versation. The importance of this principle will be seen and felt when we consider that it pertains to us, as subjects of moral government, to obey God from choice, and this contrary to much that is seen, and to many contrary suggestions which may be supposed to exert an influence on our choice. Thus Moses chose to obey God contrary to the pleasures of sin, which on one side enticed him, and contrary to the afflictions of the people of God, which on the other side would have deterred him. No principle short of this faith in God could thus have fixed his will. Again, faith, as a principle of conduct, differs essentially from an irresistible evidence to the mind. In the one there is freedom, in the other there is no freedom. Faith persuades the obedience of a right mind only—irresistible evidence compels obedience irrespective of the state of mind. In the one instance, the obedience is our own; in the other, it is the result of an overbearing force. Were the Divine government an arbitrary government, it could very readily secure our unfaltering obedience. All that would be necessary then, on the part of the Governor, would be to open the Heavens, as before the martyr Stephen, and show us the end of faith in glory, and honor, and immortality; then to open the gates of eternal death, and unfold to our vision the end of unbelief in the enduring miseries of the finally impenitent. In this case, the human mind would resemble the body of a criminal. It would be dragged along the path of obedience by chains, and with no more freedom, and consequently with no more virtue in the one, than in the other. Irresistible evidence, then, is to the mind what a chain is to the body. But the Divine government is not an arbitrary, but a moral government, and the evidences of things not seen are

so modified as to act effectively, indeed, on an honest and good heart, but admit of being overborne when the heart is insincere and the mind badly disposed.

Again, the obedience of faith—that is, moral obedience—that obedience which is suited to our moral freedom and founded in moral evidence, springs rather from the authority of the Gospel, than from any qualification on our part to fathom its depth, or to understand its scope of bearing, either on the life that now is or on that which is to come. We, indeed, as we advance in moral obedience, may make important discoveries in the consequential value of the Gospel, as the votary of science gathers fresh interest and livelier impressions from every stage in his progression; these discoveries of experience may serve to establish, strengthen, and settle our faith, and with it our virtuous obedience. In this way our obedience, which at first was moral only, becomes reasonable also. The Apostle, therefore, terms the obedience of faith a “reasonable service.”* It is not only founded in the Divine authority, but, as we go along, its excellence is wonderfully confirmed by our own experience. But we must bear in mind, that all the discoveries of experience into the fitness of the Gospel as a rule of conduct, can add nothing to the weight of its authority, and consequently nothing to its just claims on our primary obedience. The Apostle affirms of Abraham, that when called he obeyed, and he went out not knowing whither he went. In his case, that was not first which is reasonable, but that which was moral, and afterward that which was reasonable. Experience came in to confirm his faith. This is exactly the parental economy. We expect, on

* Rom. xii. 1.

the part of our children, not a reasonable, but a moral obedience. Afterwards their experience gradually comes in to confirm their virtue. Then their obedience becomes as reasonable in respect of themselves, as it is moral in respect of their parents, and this constitutes the perfection of which their obedience is capable. In one sense only, therefore, can it strictly be affirmed that a rule of conduct is fit or unfit in itself, or worthy or unworthy of obedience on our part. It is fit in itself, and worthy of our obedience when enjoined of God. It is unfit in itself and unworthy of our obedience when forbidden of God. Whatever confirmations to the excellence of a rule subsequent discoveries may afford, and however it may thus be approved to our own minds as a reasonable rule, yet, in the outset of obedience, the question is purely one of authority. "Is it written?" "Has God said?" Does my guide, the Church, in her acknowledged standards, thus understand it—she whose lips keep knowledge, and who is commissioned to teach me all things whatsoever Christ has commanded?

Again, all that we have said in respect of this primary truth was illustrated in the Garden of Eden. Among the glories of creation that opened like a splendid vision on the eyes of our first parents, there appeared, in the midst of the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: its fruit was good for food, and pleasant to the eye, and fruit to be desired to make one wise; but behold! to eat thereof was interdicted by authority. The morality of the prohibition rested solely on the authority of Him who had enacted the law. By no process of reasoning could it be made to appear, why this fruit, more than any other, should be proscribed their enjoyment; on the

contrary, the enjoyment was invited by the very appearance of the fruit, and what is more, it was recommended by the argumentation of a subtle logician who addressed their pride, as the appearance of the fruit itself had addressed their sensuality. Here, then, we have the origin of the two principles comprehended in our text. Unbelief urged its claims on the appearance of the fruit, in connection with the specious sophistry of the Evil One. Faith urged its claims on the Divine authority. Unhappily for our race, the combined powers prevailed. Sin entered by disobedience, and death by sin. A recurrence to these first principles, as here illustrated, will establish three propositions. First, that where the Gospel has spoken, contrary appearances are not to be minded ; secondly, where the Gospel has spoken, contrary argumentation is of the tempter ; and, thirdly, where the Gospel has spoken, moral obedience on our part is our wisdom, our duty, and our interest. Such, then, is the nature of faith : it is the persuasive influence of Divine authority acting on the hearts and minds of men, in opposition to the contrary appearances of things and all contrary reasonings.

The rule is perfect in itself, but, in its practical application to the human mind, its power admits of degrees. In the Divine economy it is so wisely ordered ; that as we virtuously yield our minds to the persuasive influence of Divine authority, our religious susceptibility increases, and there is gradually formed within the mind, and peculiar to itself, a testimony of great value. This inward witness is the promised reward of virtuous obedience, and is therefore a species of testimony to Divine truth which the disobedient and gain-saying can never possess. Every serious Christian carries with him more or less of this internal testimony

to the truth as it is in Jesus. As he grows in grace, he will grow in knowledge. Believing on the Son of God, he has the witness in himself. His knowledge of the doctrine will be perfected by its transforming power on the spirit of his own mind and on the habits of his own life. We should bear in mind, however, that this inward testimony consequent on the obedience of faith, differs essentially in its nature and tendencies from the mere approval of natural conscience. By their fruits we shall know them. In our fallen nature the approval of mere natural conscience strangely tends to mental inflation; it compounds strictness in the performance of one duty for great laxity, if not entire neglect, in the performance of others; but the inward testimony, the gracious witness, the promised reward of the obedience of faith, invariably increases humility, establishes the Christian character, and enlarges the sphere of Christian obedience. It is a reward freely bestowed of God, not expected by his servant. It tends, therefore, when received, to season the heart with gratitude rather than to excite its complacency.

One practical effect of faith is, that it resolves the present life into the mere threshold of our existence. Its language is, "For here have we no continuing city; but we seek one to come."* It lifts the soul from earth, and directs her views, and with it her desires and her hopes and her anticipations, to that eternal world where her destiny will be fixed for ever. The practical influence of this elevation of soul is to subordinate all inferior enjoyments, and to give to Heaven that commanding elevation in the scale of importance to which it is so justly entitled.

* Heb. xiii. 14.

Another practical effect of faith is evidenced in a peculiar spirit of mind. The man who walks by sight—whose views and feelings and habits of mind are in reality made up by the appearances of things, backed by the subtleties of the devil—is prone to measure himself with others; and well indeed is it, if he claim not all doubtful superiorities. He neither acknowledges nor feels that he is enslaved to the gratifications of his carnal mind. If some apprehensions are occasionally excited, these are quieted by a consideration of the powerful impulse which urged him on to criminal indulgence. He reasons with himself satisfactorily on all these points, nor distrusts for a moment the source from which his logic is derived. There is no humiliation on his part, on account of his sins; no self-loathing in view of the real character of his being; no vindication of God in appointed ordinances; no influential reverence of Divine authority; no submission of spirit to the moral government over which his Redeemer presides, and through which, as the Captain of their Salvation, he conducts many sons unto glory.

But how different is the case on all these points with the man who walks by faith. His views as a sinner—his feelings as a sinner—his prevailing habits of mind as a sinner—are made up essentially under the teaching of God's Word and Spirit. He feels and deploras the measure of corruption under which he groans. He daily acknowledges the faults of his nature, and his sin is ever before him. And say, what humiliation of spirit—what self-condemnation—what vindication of God—does he not derive, under the influence of that Divine rule by which his walk is determined? Under the guidance of this rule, he cannot

but recognize and acknowledge the extent and the enormity of his sins. With him there can exist no motive to cloak or dissemble sin. His is the privilege to be assured, that the faith which introduces him to the clear perception and humiliating sense of his own sinfulness, introduces him also to a Saviour, and freely admits him to a humble participation in all the blessings of redemption which that Saviour has purchased for his people. On this Saviour does he rely for all the supplies of grace, which his melancholy circumstances so imperiously require, for the pardon of his sins, for redemption from their cruel dominion, for the grace of steadfastness, for the comfort of the Holy Ghost, and for its sanctifying energies on every practical power of body and of mind.

Another effect of faith is, that it disarms death of its sting. It is difficult for us to realize what, in this solemn moment, must be the views and feelings of him who has walked only by sight. It is not improbable, indeed, that the sophistry of the Evil One, with which the mind has been long familiar, and from which all its evasive habits have been derived, may, in many instances, extend even to this momentous period, and to the very last continue to beguile its victim with delusive hope. But where the near approach of death has dispersed the fabric of life's airy vision, and opened the soul to the conviction of dread realities, how solemn is the contemplation! Who would wish, at a moment like this, to encounter the apprehensions and pangs of a guilty conscience, pointing with resistless precision to the tribunal of an offended Judge—to the worm that never dies—to the fire that is not quenched? On the other hand see, what many of us have witnessed, the last moments of expiring faith. How

able to bear up the feeblest of the feeble servants of a Redeemer! What an impressive comment on the declaration of Solomon, that "the righteous hath hope in his death!"* Here is no sophistry, no evasion of any one truth, no desperate effort to keep shut the opening avenues to conviction. Every important truth is felt—all is acknowledged. We hear him say, A dying sinner indeed I am; an unworthy sinner; but a sinner believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom I have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. What a refuge for souls impoverished and undone! How authoritative—of what inestimable value! But this composure in death is but an aspect of that faith by which the Christian lives, and by which he walks. The rule by which he dies is the same rule by which he had long since repented, separated himself from an ungodly world, and taken the Lord for his portion. It is the same rule by which he had long since yielded a spontaneous submission of himself to moral government, confessed his Redeemer before men, denied himself, and taken up his cross. It is the same rule by which, in his example, he had comforted the feeble-minded, supported the weak, and been patient toward all men. In a word, it is the same rule by which he has derived to his own soul pardon, sanctification, and peace.

But O, in eternity the development of these two principles will be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. In the present life we know but little or nothing of the unfolding of grand principles, either of good or of evil. We have sometimes seen, indeed, how great a matter a little fire kindleth; we have seen, indeed, a little one become a

* Prov. xiv. 32.

great nation; but in respect to all grand and final issues, we are utter strangers to the conception. Inspiration itself is here but a glass through which we see darkly. But this we know, under the authority of the Gospel, that the end of faith is the salvation of the soul. But salvation—who can now adequately conceive its circumference of glory? Who but the preparer can describe the things prepared for them that walk by faith? What but infinite wisdom can scan the final development of that grand principle which now sustains the Church in an evil world? Mark the descriptive terms of this final consummation: “A crown of glory that fadeth not away;”* “An inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away;”† “A far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;”‡ “The joy of thy Lord.”§ Nothing can equal the degree of glory, but the extent of its duration. As the one is infinite, so the other is eternal. And now say, what is there—what can there be in the appearances of contrary things here below, or in the contrary reasonings of the Old Serpent, in deference to which we should now be induced to hazard our interest in this final and enduring scene? O let us take heed lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God! Rather let us contemplate for a moment what the progression of faith has already accomplished for mankind, and learn something of what may be expected in the final consummation. But the unhappy victim of his eyes’ lust—the devotee of a splendid bubble—where will he appear? He who has discredited the authority of his Governor, opened his eye upon vanity and his ear to delusion, and

* 1 Pet. v. 4. † 1 Pet. i. 4. ‡ 2 Cor. iv. 17. § Matt. xxv. 21.

in both constructed for his own soul a refuge of lies; where will he appear in the great and terrible day? Look to the world we inhabit; see what the principle of sight, in its progression, backed by the insidious suggestions of the Evil One, has already accomplished; and then say, what may not be expected in the final consummation of misery? Mark the descriptive terms: "Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish;"* "Outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth;"† "The smoke of their torment, which ascendeth up for ever and ever;"‡ "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."§ Nothing can equal the degree of misery, but the extent of its duration. As the one is infinite, so the other is eternal.

Such, beloved friends, are the legitimate bearings of these two opposite principles on life, death, and eternity. That one or the other is the principle which gives character to each individual present, can be no more doubted than the existence of the principles themselves. At this very moment our destinies are suspended on one or the other of these two principles. Either we are walking by faith, and forming character under the impression of things invisible and eternal, or we are walking by sight, and forming character under the impression of things visible and temporal. Should the latter have been the unfortunate choice of any among us, in the name of an immortal spirit, let the time past of life suffice. Let me beseech you, by all that pertains to substantial peace in life, to quietness in death, to acquittal in judgment, and to glory in eternity, to repent seasonably and be converted.

* Rom. ii. 9. † Matt. viii. 12. ‡ Rev. xiv. 11. § Mark ix. 44.

“O turn away mine eyes,” says David, “lest they behold vanity; and quicken Thou me in Thy way.”* “Cease, my son,” says inspired Wisdom, “cease to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.”† The lust of the eye must be subdued—the sensual enchantment must be repelled, or we shall continue strangers to the pathway which faith prescribes, and strangers to its blissful termination in the world to come.



SERMON XXVII.

FAITH THE STAY OF THE SOUL.

“Be not afraid; only believe.”—St. Mark v. 36.

To the Church of Christ the narrative of St. Mark, which contains our text, is valuable, not only as a record of one of those stupendous works which attest the Messiahship of our Lord, but also as comprehending a standing resource of consolation and support under the failure of all natural grounds of trust. The narrative itself is simple and affecting. A distinguished personage among the Jews, named Jairus, approaches our Lord, not as others had done with questions of idle curiosity or of ensnaring subtlety, but with a humble request that he would visit his little daughter, an only child about twelve years of age, then lying at the point of death. Our Lord immediately assents; but they had not proceeded far, when His progress was delayed

* Ps. cxix. 37.

† Prov. xix. 27.

by another case of distress deemed worthy of his marked regard. Its subject was a poor woman, but rich in faith, who, for the space of twelve years, had suffered under a chronic distemper. Her humble application was not in vain. She received the end of it—a release from her affliction. But while our Lord was engaged in improving this cure to her spiritual profit, the ruler received intelligence of his daughter's decease. "Thy daughter is dead," said his informers; "why troublest thou the Master any further?" We stop to remark that there is with many persons a hasty, an irreligious way of thinking and acting on such occasions. It is a habit formed in the forgetfulness of God, and discovers a mind measured in its views and feelings by the rule only of mere natural grounds. Where these fail, a mind of this cast is prone to pass into hopelessness and dismay. "It is all over," we hear one say. "Ah! it's of no use; there is no hope." "The Lord of life and death need not trouble himself, nor be troubled by others, to go any further than natural help has gone." This is a bent of the mind and feelings as irreverent as it is ill-timed, and which is sometimes displayed upon occasions that, so far from inclining to despondence, should have roused the dormant energies of faith. "Thy daughter is dead; why troublest thou the Master any further?" And now, lest the faith of Jairus, which, under the preceding trial of its patience had approved itself, should be overcome under this unexpected intelligence, our Lord turns to him with a compassionate heart, and, in the words of our text, represses within his bosom the natural apprehensions of unbelief. "Be not afraid; only believe." Now we do not say that this injunction, in the present day, and under our circumstances, authorizes any expectation of

a miracle being wrought. In this way Christianity has been sufficiently attested once for all. The Church is itself a witness to us, chosen of God, and her testimony will be perpetuated even unto the end of the world. Her very existence is a refutation in itself of all infidelity. If we believe not this testimony, neither should we be persuaded though one rose from the dead. Still, within the liabilities of our probationary term, we meet with occasions of despondence or of dismay, which stagger all natural grounds of trust. The mind is displaced from its steadfastness, and if it stand at all under the trial, must stand by faith in God. Let us consider, then, some of the ordinary occasions of life, which, on natural principles, incline the heart to despondence, but under which it is our blood-bought privilege to stand by faith. The first and most obvious of these is allied to the occasion which elicited the text; we mean the death of tenderly beloved objects. Here, in the view of sense, the scene has closed; gloom gathers over the grave; within that narrow house all is dark, all is distrustful. It would seem incredible to nature that God should raise the dead. The mourning friends retire. The heart, in many an instance of bitter bereavement, resigns itself to inconsolable grief. But in our text the Redeemer speaks to the bereaved heart of a fond parent, and speaks with authority. While he chides these distrustful sentiments which arise where nature had failed, he sheds a bright beam of consolation on the shade which hangs over the tomb: "Be not afraid; only believe." That which is sown in corruption shall be raised in incorruption; that which is sown in dishonor shall be raised in glory; that which is sown in weakness shall be raised in power. That form so tenderly beloved, though it now tenant the grave, shall

come forth in transfigured glory, bright as the starry firmament. In every feature of that glorified state, the incorruptible body shall be fitted to the companionship of the soul, to aid her in her most vigorous motion, and to share in her joy! And how consoling to the heart, under the painful bereavements to which we are here exposed, is not this standing article of our belief! Nature, indeed, starts back at the cold touch of death. Terrible to her are the pains of dying; intimidating the voice which calls to leave the world, and in the singleness and individuality of the soul to enter on scenes untried. So, also, painful to our nature, is the severance from objects with whom our hearts had long interchanged the liveliest sympathies and affections. All nature weeps at the grave. The falling sod agonizes the hearts of surviving friends; but while the soul retains her sensibility to the Redeemer's voice, we sorrow not with hopeless hearts. "Be not afraid; only believe."

But there is a suggestion from our narrative of much spiritual importance, short of the resurrection of the body. We mean the rebuke it tacitly conveys to those who regard departed friends irreligiously—if, indeed, they sympathize with their spirit at all. It is observable that the monition in our text is opposed to this particular species of irreverence. "Why troublest thou the Master," say they, "any further?" As though the Gospel had not introduced us to the spirits of the just, nor cherished holy sympathies with these departed friends. Surely we, as Christians, ought not, in this respect, to be faithless, but believing. The spirits of those who have died in the Lord are true living members of Christ's mystical body. The invisibility of these spirits to us, by no means affects either the truth of their living reality, or of their communion with the

militant Church. Has a revered parent been transferred to the unseen department of the Church, and shall the bereaved child cease to cherish toward that disembodied saint the liveliest fellowship of a hallowed sympathy? "Thou Solomon, my son," said the dying king of Israel, "know thou the God of thy father?"* And what, may we not ask, in many an instance of a dying parent, is not the burden of the heart which cleaves to the soul, and with her is borne along to the mansion of spirits? Who that has cultured a filial reverence for ties, now severed indeed in their earthly aspect, has not often realized himself to be the object of a wakeful interest, felt, he knows not how, in the unfathomed mystery of his being? Again: Have we children, who from scenes below have winged an early flight, and now blend and mingle with kindred spirits in the habitation of the just? Do we cherish, as it is our privilege to do so, lively hopes of restoration within the intermediate state to these beloved objects, and in due time to rise with them from thence, in a transfiguration of glory, to the consummation of bliss? How genial, then, on our disposition and manner of life, must not be the influence of these sacred sympathies! How delightful the anticipation of a period before us, when the whole family, often separated in its members, and tossed on tempestuous seas, shall, not unlike to the family of Jacob, reassemble under circumstances of exceeding joy and of soul-felt gratulation! Let not, then, the faithless spirit of this world come in to chill the heart with irreligious indifference towards departed friends.

Another application of our subject concerns those

* 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

who have nurtured and brought up children as though but to witness their career of spiritual death. "My son! my son!" has been the wild utterance of overpowering grief over more than one Absalom, to all appearance thrust through with the many darts of irrecoverable death. Here again comes forward the hasty, faithless spirit of unbelief. We hear one say, "Thy son is dead;" "It's a hopeless case;" "Why troublest thou the Master any further?" Very different, indeed, are the sentiments expressed in our text, where, on natural principles, all hopes of resuscitation had fled. "Be not afraid; only believe." There is a living Redeemer who came to seek and to save that which was lost. There is an abiding Spirit which quickeneth. There is a voice which can reach the dead, and which when heard is the life inspiration of the soul. Desponding parent, cease not from prayer. "Be not afraid; only believe." Who will affix limits to Omnipotence, or distrust the munificence of its grace? Let us banish the oppressive apprehension and unbelief, which would cease to trouble the Master any further. Beneath all nature are His everlasting arms; and at His bidding the prodigal of many years shall spring from the cell of condemnation and cold embrace of death, into the warmth and vitality and energy of the living man. Among the spirits of the just, who shall tread the pavement of Heaven, and breathe the joys of that holy city, there will not be one of Adam's race who has not been awakened to life, and enriched with its attributes of faith and love and holy obedience, by the Spirit of the Most High.

The sentiment of a confiding trust in our compassionate Redeemer, has an application also to the case of the drooping penitent. That an awakened sinner should be

naturally inclined to desponding sentiments, is satisfactorily accounted for on the ground of his very partial illumination. He as yet but occupies that transition state where men are seen as trees walking. His vision of the Holy Sacrifice is obscured. It is good in itself and profitable for him that he suffer awhile, under vivid impressions of the bitter things which the finger of God hath written against him. Let us be assured, that in many an instance, and for the wisest ends, the Holy Sacrifice is hidden from our eyes. But an occasion of Satan's temptation is thus often created. Instead of cherishing within our bosoms that godly sorrow which worketh a deeper repentance, a more humiliating survey of ourselves, a more patient faith, we sink into gloom. Then cometh the Evil One with his temptations, to aggravate and inflame what already is wrong in the natural bent of the mind. "Why troublest thou the Master any further?" Sinner, thy case is hopeless. Thou hast sinned beyond the measure of grace assigned thee. Thy guilt is beyond the expiatory merit of a Redeemer's blood. Thou wast a reprobate from the womb, and art doomed to fill the measure of thine iniquity. Curse thy Maker and die.

Now it is not said that every case of uncomforted awakening is marked alike, or in equal degree, with these temptations of the Evil One. But that in every case of partial enlightenment, where sin without a Saviour is seen and felt, the natural bent of the mind is in this line, no one will be disposed to deny. Indeed, where early religious culture has been neglected, gloom and despondence must ever attend the awakenings of the Spirit, and often, through the device of Satan, have hurried their subject into an untimely grave. Far otherwise is the determination of the mind and heart

under the inspiration of our text. It points the truly awakened sinner to the Cross of Christ. In the presence of all his enemies, it spreads a table before his faith, and in the spectacle of a Holy Sacrifice there presented, assuages his instinctive fears. It bids his humble, contrite spirit, be not afraid. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. It shows his faith, how God can be just and the justifier of the ungodly. It dissipates the terror which sin had accumulated on the heart, invigorates his hopes, and inspires his soul with its own peculiar encouragements, consolations, and supports. "Be not afraid ; only believe."

Lastly: The sentiment of the text, has a just application to the professing Christian under manifold spiritual discouragement. As in the midst of life we are in death, so in the brightest enjoyment of the life spiritual, we are liable to fall into sin. Satan desires to have us, that he may sift us as wheat ; and we are made to feel that if he gain not his desire, it is through Divine intercession in our behalf, certainly not in any sufficiency of our own. And what disquieting fears have not originated in these assaults of the Evil One ! Dark indeed, and cheerless to the soul, is that cloud, which has often intercepted her best hopes and withered her purest joys. Here, too, come in the hasty informers with their cheerless tidings to enervate and kill the soul. "Why troublest thou the Master any further?" Fallen Christian, thou art twice dead, plucked up by the roots. The world reproaches thee as a vile hypocrite. Satan, who has accomplished thine overthrow, now derides thee. Thine own heart condemns thee, and God, who is greater than thine heart, has rejected thee for ever. What merciless thrusts from the world without, and from Satan within, has not the

fallen Christian endured! All condemn, but few in the spirit of meekness are forward to restore. But few consider themselves, lest they also be tempted. And yet, how have not even the mighty fallen, yielded to an implacable foe, and surrendered all that concerned their present peace or eternal joy! O how unlike to these sentiments, which incite the fallen Christian to despondence, is not the inspiration of our text: "Be not afraid; only believe." Much, indeed, is there in thy fallen condition to humble thee, much to prove thee, much to reveal to thine own heart the knowledge of itself; but nothing to still the voice of prayer, discourage effort, or relax perseverance. "Fly to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope."* Cast thy feeble distracted spirit on the merits and sufficiency of thy Redeemer. Through gloom to glory is thy pathway upward. Greater is thine Advocate with the Father, than he who is against thee. He it is, who by His secret Spirit rebukes the vile oppressor, paralyzes his dominion, defeats his policy, liberates every faculty of the soul from his debasing servitude, inspires unaffected humility, and opens the whole soul to the constraining influence of devout and grateful affection.

To conclude: The Divine inspiration of the text, and under circumstances so discouraging as were those to which it originally applied, may well fortify our own hearts under our respective measures of earthly trial. If the dear tone even of an earthly friend, tends to revive our spirits under manifold depressions; how much greater reason have we not to be thankful for the voice of Him, that speaketh from Heaven! It is the Lord our Redeemer, the Holy One

* Zech. ix. 12.

of Israel. He bids us be not afraid, to be of good cheer, to hold fast our confidence, to trust His word, His wisdom and His power. This is our duty, our privilege, our interest and reward. Not to be dismayed, where nature cannot reach, but humbly to intrench our souls within the everlasting arms. Blessed ground of trust. Grateful to the soul in every age, is the consolation which Jairus received. Great was the reward of the pious confidence he reposed. May this trust, this consolation, this reward be ours.

SERMON XXVIII.

CHARITY A PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

“ Follow after charity.”—1 Cor. xiv. 1.

No principle of wisdom admits of more general application, than that under which a man proposes to himself an ultimate object of high consideration, which all inferior attainments are made to promote. The merchantman, in the parable, embarked in an enterprise of this kind; his leading object was to possess himself of a pearl of pre-eminent worth; but, as this did not immediately appear, he commenced with seeking goodly pearls, comparing their distinctive excellencies and relative values as they came into his possession. At length he gained the object of his pursuit. He found one pearl which combined within itself the distinctive excellence of every other, and the aggregate value of the whole. It was indeed a pearl of great price, one

which he had earnestly desired, had looked for, had followed after with unwearied assiduity, and having found, was determined to make it his own. He parted with all his goodly stock, which he had held as auxiliary only, and invested the proceeds in this one pearl of pre-eminent worth. Now, in the wisdom of this merchantman, our Lord gives us a right understanding both of the nature and perfection of Christian charity, and also of what is implied in following after it. These are the two points on which we purpose to discourse. "Follow after charity." The nature of charity is unquestionably divine; it is that which by nature we cannot have; it is born of the Spirit, and may be defined as a quiet, abiding, affectionate principle in the soul of man, responsive to the love of God, and is therefore described by the Apostle as the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.* Such, briefly, is its nature, which will further appear as we consider in what its perfection consists. If we revert to the pearl of great price, we shall discover that its pre-eminence consisted in no disintegrated excellence, in no one glaring property, but in combining within itself the distinctive excellence of every other pearl, thereby giving an even result of beauty peculiar to itself. It is just so in the case before us. So unobtrusive is Christian charity, that, to the unskilful eye, it is likely to be disparaged in the glare of many a disintegrated grace which has given celebrity to its subject. Here is a man, for instance, who speaks with the tongues of men, has the faculty of wielding the languages of all nations, of such commanding eloquence, too, that he would seem to wield a celestial

* Rom. v. 5.

dialect in strains harmonious and sublime. The Apostle himself, at one time, possessed these powers in an eminent degree. He would not underrate them; but they were unsatisfying. He followed after charity, and felt that, without charity, all these adventitious aids were nothing; indeed so lightly, in comparative view, did God esteem them, that in the case of the Apostle he took them away, and left him weak in bodily presence, and contemptible in his speech.

Here is another man who has the gift of prophecy, and understands all mysteries and all knowledge. No man than St. Paul was more eminently endowed in this way. No man had attained to a deeper insight into the mysteries of redemption. He seems to have carried about him an awful impression of Heaven's realities and of the holy mysteries revealed. In spiritual knowledge he excelled. He could have answered definitively a thousand questions on theology, which in all subsequent ages have agitated the Church. As, in his own day, he was a man with whom none could consort without becoming wiser and better, so, being dead, he yet speaketh. The Church approaches his Epistles as she would a fountain of spiritual knowledge, enriching her faith and her affection with the wisdom which for her sake God had been graciously pleased to lodge in him. Yet mark, profound as was his understanding of holy mysteries, eminent as were his endowments of spiritual knowledge, these were not his ultimate object: they were goodly pearls, but not the pearl of pre-eminent worth which he followed after; he regarded them as subsidiary only to his leading pursuit; disconnected from this pursuit as unsatisfying—affording no evidence whatever of love. But here we have another man, endowed with all faith, so that he can remove moun-

tains. He has never yielded to any discouragement; no difficulty has ever deterred his heart; he has made progress against wind and tide; has fallen but to rise again; has been cast down, but to resume with unabated energy his first works, and to begin again with bought experience. All his vexations have served but to deepen the feeling of his own infirmity, and to enlarge his confidence in the sufficiency only of God his Saviour. No man than the holy Apostle was more eminently endowed with faith. In whatever point of view we regard his character or his course, we see something which nature could never have inspired, a mystery which nature could not solve. We see a man crucified with Christ, nevertheless living, yet living not in virtue of any power of his own, but in virtue of Christ living in him; so that the life which he now lived in the flesh was not the natural course which the world follows, but one originating in the faith of the Son of God, and sustained only by that faith; and he seems to have had all faith, both in kind and degree. By no thought can we conceive of a more prompt, a more decisive, a more simple assent to the word of Christ than he exhibited; of more deadness to those motives which ordinarily influence and determine the human mind; of a stronger hold on the reality of the invisible world, or of more keenness and assiduity in acting upon earnest conviction. Yet mark, faith is, indeed, a goodly pearl, but it was unsatisfying to the Apostle; it was not his ultimate object even this side the grave. He was a man that followed after charity: but all faith is no evidence whatever of charity. Separate from the object of his desire, he esteemed it as nothing. Again, here are entombed the ashes of a man who had endowed the poor with all his goods, and then aspired to

martyrdom for the truth's sake. He had found what he sought, and, at the stake, his body had been consumed in the holy cause which he had espoused. Well, a tender consideration of the temporal wants of our fellow-men is a goodly pearl; and martyrdom, when it meets us in God's pathway, ought not to be evaded. It is a great virtue not to count one's own life too dear unto one's self. But neither splendid acts of munificence nor martyrdom at the stake are any evidence whatever of charity. No man than St. Paul was more munificent in his sacrifices to the cause which he had espoused. He had torn himself, body and soul, heart and mind, from error and corruption, though these were associated with all the prejudice of education and clad with all the attraction which worldly circumstance could impart: the cause which he had espoused was held in ignominy and contempt by all the higher walks of his day, and conducted him as by strait paths to persecution, suffering, and death. The martyrdom which actually terminated his existence had long been expected, and in its advance to his embrace had been preceded by bonds and imprisonment, by corporal inflictions, and every other indignity which the madness of the people, backed by power and armed with authority, could inflict; yet all this lavish sacrifice and all this suffering, with the certainty of a violent death before him, and his readiness to meet it in forms the most terrific, however it might attest his faith and approve his sincerity, was no evidence whatever of charity: in itself, it was no passport to the kingdom. The most splendid acts, combined with the spirit of martyrdom, have been exhibited by those whose bosoms Christian charity has never warmed. Now almsgiving and the spirit of martyrdom were not underrated by the Apos-

tle, but were deemed by him unsatisfying. He followed after charity, and could never relax either his assiduity or his prayers in the pursuit of this main object of his desire.

Now we are not to suppose that because the graces to which we have referred, are no evidence of charity, that, therefore, charity does not combine these graces within her own excellence. As she can speak with the tongues of men and of angels, so she evidences her deep insight into holy mysteries, her spiritual knowledge, the excellency of her faith, her tender consideration for the poor, her spirit of martyrdom. If any man think he hath whereof to boast, she more—she combines what he has with many attainments he has not. Her very distinctive worth is the result of combination, and she is therefore termed by the Apostle “the fulfilling of the Law;”^{*} and again “the end of the Commandment.”[†] It being the design of all commandments under the law, as well as of all graces of the Spirit under the Gospel, to produce a pearl of inestimable value, known in the original under the name of love, but which in our translation is sometimes rendered charity. But what the law could not do, being enfeebled, as it were, in its power of authority by the prevalence of human corruption, the Spirit of God has undertaken; and by first regenerating our nature, and then leading it on from one attainment in grace to another, He designs that the righteousness of the Law shall be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after His guidance.

It becomes important, therefore, to consider secondly, what is implied in following after charity. To

* Rom. xiii. 10.

† 1 Tim. i. 5.

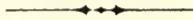
follow after charity is to be led by the Spirit; for as the Divine Spirit has graciously undertaken to do for us what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through our corrupt nature, so it is of indispensable moment to this end, that we individually surrender ourselves to be led by the Spirit. By no other power, and through no other medium, can our nature be put in possession of this pearl of great price. The gift of the Spirit for this end, was itself a consequent on the infinite humiliation of the Son of God; and it were better that our nature should never have been redeemed from sin and eternal death, than afterwards to resist the Holy Ghost in carrying out the great purpose of our redemption. The rule over us, as Christ's purchase, is lodged with the Spirit. He is our rightful governor; and as he led the Redeemer himself, and sustained him in His mediatorial conflict and passion, so it is His peculiar office to lead us onward from the beginning of our course to its termination, fulfilling in our nature *here* the "righteousness of the Law," and crowning that nature *hereafter* with glory and honor. Mark the leading stages through which the Spirit conducts obedient children to that happy issue. He regenerates our nature; the effect of which is, as the Apostle expresses it, "to condemn sin in the flesh,"* that is, to weaken its power—to take our nature out of the appalling control of the Evil One, and to incorporate it into Christ's mystical body, which is the Spirit's peculiar province. The Spirit, too, operates faith in our hearts, the fruits of which will be variously manifested in kind and in degree. Its riper exhibitions will appear in a prompt, decisive, simple assent to

* Rom. viii. 3.

God's testimony—in a comparative deadness of the soul to mere earthly motives—in appreciating the invisible things of God—in lively impressions of the superiority of these invisible realities to the best aspects of earthly honor. To this faith the Spirit adds virtue—that is, Christian courage. This grace is opposed to that timidity under which we shrink from difficulties as they open upon us. Faith is increased by the exercise of this Christian courage both actively and passively displayed. They exert a reciprocal influence. The soul waxes valiant in her warfare as her faith rises; and, in turn, faith is made strong by the exercise of this virtue. To this enlargement the Spirit adds knowledge—that is, Christian experience. By experience we compare spiritual things with spiritual, the thing itself in our own case with the record of it in God's Word. The Spirit overrules our very sins to this invaluable end, as it overruled Peter's denial of his Master to his improvement in humility. This shows us the value of that rule and guidance to which our blind and wayward nature has been intrusted. To Christian experience the Spirit adds temperance—that is, moderation in all things. To this moderation, patience is added, which curbs our instinctive hastiness, and schools it down into submission to God's times and seasons. To patience, godliness is added, a due regard for God's righteous claims on our adoration and praise, comprehending a set time for devotion, a set place, a form of sound words, and above all the inward fear and reverence of Almighty God. To this godliness the Spirit adds brotherly kindness, a plain Christian grace, manifold in its exhibitions, and suggested by community of sin and suffering among the brethren of redemption and grace. Now if in this enlargement of graces we

have diligently co-operated with the Spirit, have been vigilant as to His motions, and prompt and simple under His monitions, He will combine what we may term the essence of all these graces, and give a new and an even result to our Christian character, under the title of charity. This charity is our meetness for Heaven; and as it never faileth, so it will cleave to our spirits, as these spirits enter the eternal world, when every thing else has failed, and there will immeasurably expand, affording to the soul a reality of joy unspeakable and full of glory. But we must now patiently follow on to know the Lord. We cannot force love into our own souls, much less into the souls of others. We must follow after charity as the Spirit leads. We must be content to arrive at it through many difficulties and through much tribulation, and by a succession of virtues, to each of which the Spirit will both open the way and empower us to rise. With the Spirit itself, indeed, the end of the commandment is as obvious as is the beginning; but to our nature it is not so. We see in part only, as the eyes of our understanding are enlightened, and know only in part. But the sphere of our experience under the Spirit, like that of our vision, will widen. With the lowly only is wisdom. Of one truth we may be well persuaded, that He who hath begun a good work in us, if not obstinately resisted, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Oh! then, let us not grieve the Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed until the day of redemption. Let us rather diligently work with him while it is day, in securing to our spirits the end of the commandment. Let us study the properties of Christian charity, as pointed out by the Apostle, and compare what is there recorded with the realities of our individual case. Be assured,

if our hearts are in the work, we shall not remain barren and unfruitful; we shall make increase. We cannot force, indeed, our growth in grace. We must work in faith and patience—in lowliness and humility—in prayer and self-denial, looking to God, who giveth the former and the latter rain, who crowns the blade with the ear, and the ear with the full corn. In due time we shall reap if we faint not.



SERMON XXIX.

CHRISTIAN HOPE.

“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”—Col. i. 27.

HOPE is one of the most interesting affections which enliven our nature. It implies the approbation of its object on account of some real or imaginary excellence, also the possibility of possessing that object; it implies, moreover, the desire as well as the expectation of attaining to that possession. This expectation of gaining the object of desire, is always attended to the mind with pleasing emotions. All earthly hopes are interwoven with so many contingencies, and their object even when gained is held by so precarious a tenure, that a question has arisen, whether it be not wiser and safer, not to hope at all, than to hope amidst so much uncertainty in the pursuit, and so much insecurity in the possession. The error is not in hoping, but in hoping amiss. The will of God in the matter, should limit all our earthly hopes. Our sentiment should be, “Thy will be done,” in us, by us, and through us. This

being our heart's desire and prayer, we are privileged to hope in God, that He will direct us in all our doings with His most gracious favor, and further us with His continual help. That He will appoint us to that sphere in life, to that condition and to the possession of that measure of earthly good, in which His own name may be most honored by us and our final happiness most effectually secured. We remark the more on these earthly hopes, because of error too common even among Christian people. We but too often cherish earthly hopes with no filial reference whatever in the case to our Father's will. We make no estimate of those remote consequences, which Infinite Wisdom alone is competent to survey.

The prevailing sentiment with too many Christians seems to be this: "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." Give me the earthly object of my heart's desire, and I will hazard all the issues in the case. The consequences be upon us and our children. It is affirmed of Israel in the wilderness, that God "gave them their desires and sent leanness withal into their souls."* And it will be well if in the day of final account, it be not made apparent, that thousands have gained the object of their worldly aspiration at the most fearful and irredeemable cost to their souls. We may further remark in relation to earthly hopes, that although under any circumstances, their object may elude our grasp and mortify our unavailing solicitude, yet they admit of some discrimination. They may be rational and well founded, or they may be enthusiastic and visionary. Thus, rational hopes of attaining to the honorable possession of earthly good, can originate only in

* Ps. cvi. 15.

habits of industry and economy, combined with a due regard to the sacred claims of the Gospel, and of the poor with which it has pleased God to surround us.

Without industry we cannot create earthly good—without prudence we cannot enlarge it—without fidelity to our trust, and vindication of our God, we cannot retain it. A man, indeed, can have no infallible certainty of obtaining large worldly means, but he may be assured, in the order of Providence, of obtaining that measure of means most conducive to the glory of God and to his own real welfare. Our text introduces us, however, to a new and more exalted, and more enduring object of hope. We mean, future and unfading glory. The term “glory” is sometimes associated in Scripture with conquest, sometimes it is descriptive of grandeur; most commonly it is taken for celestial felicity. When we consider, that even an earthly object often exhibits a degree of splendor which dazzles the mind and kindles the fervor of ambition, though we know it to terminate often in disgust and disappointment, what ought not to be the influence upon the mind of that crown of glory, of that far more exceeding great and eternal weight of felicity, which combines within itself all that is glorious in the sublimest triumphs—all that is enrapturing in grandeur, unmixed as is the radiance of God’s throne, and eternal as is the throne itself? Now consider this glory in respect of the body. The body of man is now sown in corruption. In innumerable instances it withers within the earliest stages of its development; at best, it is but a vile body, the instrument often of sin and temptation, liable to numerous diseases, exposed to perpetual dangers, limited in the term of its existence, and appointed to return to earth, to ashes, and to dust. But look at

the condition of the body as a component part of glory, the object of Christian hope. "For if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead, dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you."* Incorruptibility will then become an attribute of the body, made spiritual and immortal. The food now indispensable to its support will be no longer required. The imbecilities of childhood or the decrepitudes of age will have ceased for ever. The whole body will be a glorious structure perfectly adapted to the enlarged powers of the soul, and to the purer delights of an unchanging state.

Mark also the future condition of the soul divinely assured to the Christian hope. "Now we see through a glass darkly."† With what a cumbrous burden are not even the most active energies of a capacious mind now weighed down, or impeded in their noblest functions? Who among us has not felt to-day, and in every endeavor to realize sweet communion with God, the full influence of this cumbrous weight? Mark, too, by what trivial occurrences the best exercises of the soul are often hindered, or baffled altogether. When we would think that which is good, evil is present with us. A thousand vanities obtrude upon the mind, which overcloud the light of truth. And when we consider that our knowledge of truth is at best very imperfect, what precautions are not imperiously required on our part? What lowliness of mind, what temperance in all things, what devotion of spirit to the things of the Spirit? But in this view, what a glorious ennoblement of the soul, what privileged exemptions are not divinely as-

* Rom. viii. 11.

† 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

sured to the Christian hope? "Then shall we see face to face, then shall I know even also as I am known." All the faculties of the soul will be improved. What additional powers and intuitive perceptions will not reason acquire? How prompt and final will be the determinations of the judgment, how unwarped, how true to the line, the judgment itself. All will be clear, all will be perspicuous, all will flow into the soul like the pure emanations of the greater light, and irradiate every chamber with noontide beams. Mark, too, the blessed company of the saints, as a constituent part of that glory which is the object of Christian hope. Here on earth, association must be often based on false and even dangerous grounds. Men instinctively incline to those who sympathize most in their own peculiar sentiments, most advance their own peculiar interests, and most agreeably flatter their own peculiar vanities. We choose rather to be kissed by an enemy than to be rebuked by a friend; and thus it happens, that the associations of the present life, so far from entailing a blessing, often accelerate the progress with which we ourselves already are speeding on to utter ruin. There is meaning in those words which "He" spake, who, of all intellectual and moral intelligences, was the best friend of our race. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth. I came not to send peace, but a sword."* But in that world where the Christian hope is laid up, the sweet communion of saints, the sacred association of the people of God, will be infinitely delightful not merely in itself, but in the deep consciousness, that the God of truth himself is the eternal centre in that holy communion

* Matt. x. 34.

of all blessed Spirits. Our sentiments, our views, our sympathies, will not merely coalesce, but converge to that central point. It will be God ; no other principle of association than this will be recognized, no other will be required to perfect the unity of the Church triumphant, in an eternity of joy. Think then of the constituents of that glory which the merciful God assures to our hope. Think of a body incorruptible, spiritual, glorious. Think of a soul advanced to the perfection of her nature, and enriched by a munificent God with all princely endowments. Think of a countless multitude, a blessed company drawn together and consolidated in perfect moral unity ; and all converging to a central point, pure, holy, and divine. Think, moreover, of the city which hath foundations, and of the river of God which is full of water. Think of the celestial choir and of the sacred melody, as it rises and swells inconceivably through illimitable space. Think of the new song, which will unite the hearts and the voices of Abel, and of Enoch, and of Noah, and of Job, and of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ; and of the Holy Prophets, and of the blessed Apostles, and of an army of Martyrs, and of infinite numbers out of all ages from the beginning to the end of time ; and out of all nations, and kindred, and tongues, and people. And finally, think of the eternity of this state, the perpetual enjoyment of this glory, undamped by one apprehension of its being lost, but rather more refulgent under the deep-wrought and imperishable conviction that it will endure for ever. Such, and infinitely beyond our boldest conceptions, is the glory indicated in our text—such the object propounded to our hope in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let us proceed to inquire what is the only founda-

tion of this reasonable, religious, and holy hope. On this deeply interesting point our text, though short, is comprehensive and decisive. "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Christ made known to us, not so much outwardly by a preached Gospel, as inwardly by the operations of the Spirit. This appears to be the discrimination here made by the Apostle. "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." It would seem, then, that as it is the office of the Gospel ministry to make known Christ by preaching Him to every creature, so it is the office of the Holy Spirit to make known Christ inwardly, to reveal Him to the soul, as the well-spring of her life, the source of her comfort, the foundation of her hope of glory. The propriety of summing up, in the indwelling of Christ, what had just been termed "the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles," may appear, if we will consider that in Christ, in His person and offices, God displays to sinners the unsearchable treasures of His grace and mercy. The Apostle preached among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. This was an indispensable preliminary in the work; but it was Christ in them, by His Spirit, the life of the soul, that their circumstances mainly required, and on which their hope of glory was essentially to depend. It was the application to their own spiritual necessities of all the acts of Christ's mediation. This, by his progressive operation, the Holy Spirit alone was competent to effect. Let us consider, then, those leading operations of the Spirit, which enter essentially into a well-founded hope of future and eternal glory. The atonement offering commenced in the incarnation of the Eternal Son; it was prosecuted in His

spotless life and perfect obedience; it was finished in His sufferings and death. By it God is reconciled to a world of sinners; and through the operation of the Spirit we must be brought to receive the atonement, and in our reconciliation to God and filial relation to Him, to realize its efficacy in our individual case. Now have we received this atonement? Have we ever realized, in this stupendous exhibition of Divine grace and mercy, an all-subduing power, which has destroyed the inherent enmity of our apostate state—prostrated the scorn of our nature—rebuked the perverseness of our wills—turned our warm affections towards God—inspired our souls with unfeigned contrition, and elicited our best and sincerest endeavors to serve and please God in God's own revealed way? Look to the prodigal son, and especially at that interesting crisis when overpowering evidence of a father's love had expelled from his bosom every servile sentiment. O how now reconciled in spirit—how disarmed of that haughty recklessness, under the baneful influence of which he had been led captive by Satan, had forsaken his father's house, had perverted and squandered his best gifts, and involved his own soul in degradation and ruin! Yes, truly it is an operation of the Holy Spirit under which we receive the atonement, and with it, so manifest a change in the spirit of our minds and hearts, as can leave no reasonable doubt of Christ being in us the hope of glory.

That the receiving the atonement, with its proper evidence in the filial spirit and affection we possess, is essential to any well-founded hope, no man familiar with Scripture experience can question. It is the very foundation of this hope. It is Christ in us, the chief corner-stone. Other foundation can no man lay than

that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Not merely Jesus Christ preached to us or among us, but Christ in us—Christ revealed in us by the Spirit, received by us in faith unfeigned, and witnessed to us in the reconciliation of our own spirits to God through Himself, and in pure love of the brethren. How clear is the Apostle on this point, to which he alludes while pressing another claim! “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life; and not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.”* Again: as the hope of glory has its foundation in what Christ hath suffered for us, so in Christ also, through the operations of the Spirit, must this foundation be built upon. The death of Christ finished the great work of our redemption from sin and eternal death; but the spiritual and eternal life imparted to our souls refers more immediately to what He has procured for us through His resurrection, His ascension, His session at the right hand of God, His continual intercession with God in our behalf. As we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, so we are to be saved by His life. As through the Holy Spirit we receive the atonement, so through the self-same Spirit we receive Christ, the resurrection and the life of our souls. “If we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection.”† The doctrine here inculcated is very perspicuously set forth in our Baptismal Service: “Remembering always that Baptism representeth unto us our profession, which is to follow

* Rom. v. 10, 11.

† Rom. vi. 5.

the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto Him; that as He died and rose again for us, so should we who are baptized die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness—continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living.” This is an exposition by the Church of “Christ in us,” through the Spirit, in the likeness of His resurrection; and we may perceive how inseparably dependent on these spiritual operations must be any well-founded “hope of glory.” The old man being crucified with Christ, must continually be dying off; while the new man which is risen with Christ must continually be enlarging his domain. As the death is dying in our nature, so the new life is living and growing in the other; and if Christ be in us, we shall certainly, through the Spirit, realize both the dying and the living again. The old man will decrease; the new man will increase. Again: The power of Christ’s ascension must be realized in our own souls through the Spirit. “If ye then be risen with Christ,” says an Apostle, “seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.”* To be made like unto Christ in His ascension, our affections under the Holy Spirit must be supremely transferred to things above. Without newness of affection, our religious character, and with it our hope of glory, must be exceedingly insecure. We tremble for that man who, retaining his earthly affections in all their supremacy, is vainly endeavoring to serve God. For the same reason that Christ rose from the dead did He ascend to His Father. His life was hid from the world in God. And so, for the same reason that we would

* Col. iii. 1.

walk in newness of life, must our affections be set on things above. Our life also must be hid from the world with Christ in God. In the Collect for the Ascension Day, the Church teaches us to pray, "that like as we do believe Thy only begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens; so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell." The agency of the Holy Spirit in this operation is recognized in the Collect for the Sunday after the Ascension Day. Having referred to the ascension of our Lord, the Collect proceeds: "Leave us not comfortless, but send to us Thine Holy Ghost to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place, whither our Saviour Christ is gone before."

Finally: The intercession of Christ must be realized, through the Holy Spirit, in our own souls. We must be made like unto Him, through the Spirit, in supplication. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.* This is that peculiar operation of the Spirit, to which the Prophet refers, when he speaks of the "spirit of grace and of supplication"† being poured out upon the Church. The spirit of prayer enters essentially into a well-founded hope of glory. Let us remember, that though special exercises of prayer are highly expedient, yet the mind must abide in the spirit of prayer. Our habitual frame of mind must become devotional and supplicatory. As the Apostle expresses it, "Pray without ceasing;"‡ and again, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit."§ We must not be unacquainted also with the unutterable groan-

* Rom. viii. 26. † Zech. xii. 10. ‡ 1 Thes. v. 17. § Eph. vi. 18.

ings of the Spirit in our own souls. The soul, if we may so express it, has with Christ her devotional agonies, into which but very few or no words can find place. We may thus perceive that as Christ intercedes for us outwardly and at the right hand of God, so, through the Spirit, he intercedes for us inwardly in our own souls. Such, beloved friends, is the reasonable, religious, and holy hope in which, to the unspeakable joy of the heart, it is our privilege to live and to die. To conclude: You all hope for heavenly glory; but is it not wise, with David, to inquire seasonably, "What is my hope?" It may be your hope is but the presuming confidence of a careless levity, or a mere speculation to amuse the fancy. Both are destined to vanish away when their supports and consolations are most needed. But the hope which maketh not ashamed hath its foundation in the atonement of the Son of God, received by us sacramentally and spiritually, and attested to us by the Holy Spirit, in a comfortable sense of our reconciliation with God and filial relation to Him. It hath also, as we have seen, its superstructure through the Spirit, in the newness of our lives—in the supremacy of our heavenly affections—in the devotional and supplicatory frame of our minds. Let not an individual among us dream of heaven, while short of these witnessings of the Spirit to the validity of his hope. To the hope we have described only is future glory assured, as its legitimate object; and as the blessed anticipations of this glory are now full of comfort under all the pressures of life, so the glory itself will most certainly be realized to our unspeakable and endless joy.

SERMON XXX.

MARKS OF LOVE.

“ But the fruit of the Spirit is love.”—Gal. v. 22.

It appears to be the drift of the Apostle's discourse, in this instructive Epistle, to disabuse the Galatian Church of some dangerous errors in religion, into which it had incautiously fallen. In prosecuting this purpose, the Apostle finds it necessary to enumerate some of the leading works of the flesh. These works, he tells us, “ are manifest ;” but the fruit of the Spirit, unlike that of the flesh, is not manifest. It can be known only by those marks, which, for our learning, inspiration has written. For the same reason that this fruit is intrinsically good and valuable, has it been counterfeited by the sagacious adversary of the soul. The world abounds with spurious affection, claiming to be highly spiritual, in which, however, the precious fruit of the Spirit can find no place. Not merely has the Church of God to contend with *evil* in its obvious form, but with spiritual wickedness, with bad inspirations under guise of an effusion of the Spirit ; with warm but unchastened feelings which, under show of religion, seize upon the spirits of men and delude them with spectres of angelic light. Some strange and unaccountable fascination of this kind, it appears, had seized upon the Galatian Church, and, under color of a deeper and more concentrated aspect of religion, had drawn it away from the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and bid fair to lay waste all the landmarks by which the Family of God could be identified in the world, or attested to genera-

tions to come. It was of great moment, therefore, that the Galatians, and through them well disposed persons in all ages, should be instructed in those infallible marks by which an affection, wrought by the Holy Spirit, may be distinguished from those spurious substitutions, with which the world will always abound. We purpose, then, in the present discourse, to consider, first, the primary and external mark by which the fruit of the Spirit is attested; then those more particular marks, which are internal, and appear only under closer inspection.

The primary and external mark will become apparent when we consider that "love," as a fruit of the Spirit, is an attribute only of the Church of God; it is the bond of union only to the House of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth; it is the golden ligament which holds the head of this family to the members thereof, and the members thereof to the head and to each other. The very notion of love, as a fruit of the Spirit, implies the existence of the Church of God. The families of the earth have, indeed, their peculiar bond of affection, originating in nature, however, improvable by grace. In all instances of voluntary religious association beyond the Church, the cementing tie is but an expansion of the merest selfishness, which a stroke from within rarely fails to divide or shatter. We may see, then, that as associations of various character, civil and religious, have their peculiar and appropriate bonds, which either nature or circumstance may have originated, so the Family of God has an emanation from the Spirit for this end. The fruit of the Spirit is the bond of the Church; her distinctive affection. Would we find the fruit of the Spirit, we must first seek the kingdom of

God. No truth can be more obvious than this. Would we behold how good and joyful a thing it is to dwell together in unity, we must first look for the Hill of Zion. As the precious ointment was poured on the head of Aaron, and as the dew descended on Mount Hermon, so true love, the holy bond, the fruit of the Spirit, is the peculiar unction of the Church. "There," says David, "the Lord promised his blessing, and life for evermore."* It is observable, that, as a preliminary measure to the outpouring of the Spirit, and to the enrichment of the human heart with its peculiar affection, the Christian Church was instituted by our Lord as its appointed abiding place; here only was to be its habitation. They only who were baptized into this one body were made to drink into this one Spirit. The Apostle Peter could assure the fruit of the Spirit to them only who, after having been duly qualified, were incorporated into this mystical body. "Repent," says he, "and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."† He could give no assurance to man beyond the Divine promise, and this promise of the Holy Spirit and its precious fruit pertained strictly to the Church: not, indeed, that all who were born of God into the Church would illustrate the distinctive spirit and affection of the Church, no more than that all who are born into a noble family illustrate the nobility of that family; but the meaning seems to be, that the Church is the peculiar habitation of the Spirit, and here only are the fruits of the Spirit to be expected.

When men of lowly and penitent dispositions of

* Ps. cxxxiii. 3.

† Acts ii. 38.

mind are received into the House of God, which is the Church of the living God, an unearthly Family, through which God's own Spirit is diffused, and which it animates as an all-pervading soul, then the bond which is here felt, and by which the members hold to the head and to each other, and all to the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, is so far the legitimate bond, the fruit of the Spirit, asserted in our text. He that thus loveth is born of God; his living membership in God's family is thus outwardly attested by the Spirit. Under no other circumstances, and with no other association, can we be certified or assured, on any rational or scriptural ground, that the affection which has seized upon our spirits, which enkindles our zeal, and inclines to self-sacrifice, is from above. "We are of God," says an Apostle; as the Church is no creature of human contrivance, so her bond of affection is no tie of earthly inspiration. "We are of God." "He that knoweth God heareth us: he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."* What the Apostle here asserts would seem to mean this much at least: that the effusion of the Spirit and the inspiration of its precious fruit pertain to the Church only; and by this outward rule, as far as it goes, may the character not only of all doctrines, but of all religious confidences and affections, be determined; for, though the prevailing doctrine or affection within the Church at any given time is not by necessary consequence of the Spirit's working, yet, beyond the Church, the fruit of the Spirit is nowhere authenticated to us.

What the Apostle affirms of spirits—that is, of men

* 1 John iv. 6.

professing to have the Spirit of God—is equally applicable to those affections which, under semblance of religion, fasten on the human mind and enkindle its zeal. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God.”* So we are not to believe that every affection which, under claim of religion, seizes upon the mind and inflames its ardor, is the fruit of the Spirit; but we are to try these affections by scriptural marks, and by these marks is their true character to be determined. This primary and outward mark we have considered would be conclusive, did not the liability to be deceived by Satan extend to the Church herself. A practised eye, therefore, and enlightened inspection become necessary, and accordingly, certain internal marks are laid down in Scripture by which we may try spiritual affections, whether they be of God. Of this kind are the ordinary attendants on the fruit of the Spirit, as enumerated by the Apostle, in connection with our text. These attendants we may term the inspiration of true love; they are joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. These internal marks are recorded especially for the use of the Church, that she may know at any time, and on serious examination, whether her own prevailing affection is the fruit of the Spirit, or some vain confidence only engendered by Satan. Let us consider these accompaniments of the Spirit in the consecutive order in which they are enumerated by the Apostle. If our love be the fruit of the Spirit, it will be attended habitually with that tranquil effect which the Apostle terms “joy in the Holy Ghost,” and which, in another place, he declares is an attribute only

* 1 John iv. 1.

of the Kingdom of God. This joy is strictly analogous to what we ordinarily term the happiness of a family. It is no passion. It is no noisy, tumultuous excitement of feeling, which by so many well-meaning persons is misconceived for religious joy. We envy not these well-meaning people their joy. I had rather be a mourner in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of this exaltation. The house of God has a more excellent and a more enduring joy. This is a mild emanation from true love diffused through every chamber of the soul. When the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost given unto us; when the word of Christ dwells in us richly in all wisdom; when our love of the brethren is unfeigned, a tranquilizing effect insensibly follows, and is perceived in that habitual temperament which so largely ministers to our own and to the happiness of those around us. This emanation from true love is what the Scriptures term joy. It is termed also "the comfort of love,"* because under this peculiar inspiration of true love, the Holy Spirit comforts the Church in all her tribulations. Let the outward condition be what it may, this joy is the same. It is the same sweet melody of a well-tuned heart; it is the silent psalm-singing of a merry soul; it is the delight of the Church in her chief Shepherd, whose banner over her is love. Such abiding joy, as it subordinates earthly to spiritual and eternal things, so it wonderfully exalts our spirits above the ordinary shocks and vicissitudes of this mortal life. The whole body of the Church, when thus affected, will exhibit the pleasing spectacle of a happy family. And we should remember that, as joy in the Holy Ghost is a recorded

* Phil. ii. 1.

attribute of the Kingdom of God, so it is the recorded privilege of the whole Church to be joyful. "O be joyful in the Lord, all ye lands; serve the Lord with gladness, and come before his presence with a song."* "I have spoken unto you," says our Lord, "that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."†

Another internal mark, by which the fruit of the Spirit may be distinguished from all imposing substitutions, is peace. When true love prevails within the Church, and the comfort of love is realized in the joy of the heart, peace ascends like a gentle exhalation, and descends to enrich and adorn every avenue of the soul. The God of hope, who fills the Church with all joy, fills her also with all peace in believing; and as this peace contributes largely to keep the heart and mind in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, so it effectively rebukes both turbulence of passion and the importunity of earthly desire. Peace is not difficult of realization to him in whose heart the love of God is shed abroad, and who lives habitually under the breathings of its joy; but most difficult it is to be realized by him whose religion is defective in these internal attestations of the Spirit. Be the vine ever so true, such an unfruitful branch lives beneath his privileges—minds earthly things, and by earthly things must be embittered in soul. On the contrary, let but the fruit of the Spirit abound, and the comfort of this fruit be realized, and soon every sword and spear drawn against us will be transformed into instruments of peace. "O Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace

* Ps. c. 2.

† John xv. 11.

be within thy walls, and plenteousness within thy palaces.”* “My peace,” said our Lord, “I give unto you.”†

Another internal mark of the fruit of the Spirit, is “long-suffering.” By long-suffering, we may understand a patient, enduring disposition of mind for another’s sake. It seems to be opposed to a hasty, inconsiderate, resentful temper. The Holy Spirit presides within the Church, not for condemnation, but for instruction, correction, and amendment; and in executing this office, He begets within the Church a spirit of reciprocal forbearance for each other’s sake. Each member counting not himself to have attained to full measure, extends to his fellows that sympathy and forbearance which, in some other respects, his own case indubitably requires. It being understood as a fundamental article in the Church compact or covenant of grace, that all the members of the body, in dependence on the presiding Spirit, and under his persuasive motives, should aim diligently and devoutly to grow in knowledge and in grace, and to perfect that which is wanting in the due consistency and proportion of their Christian character. The moral end of long-suffering, therefore, is spiritual improvement, on the part of him to whom it is extended. And as this is a just and sufficient motive for its exercise on our part and in behalf of others, so it is the only reasonable ground of its expectation from others in our own behalf. The sentiment is well expressed in the parable, “If it bear fruit well, if not, then shalt thou cut it down.” Now, as every member is presumed in charity to be mindful of his covenant stipulation, and to be rightly affected

* Ps. cxxii. 6.

† John xiv. 27.

in the matter of its improvement, so one mark of the true love asserted in our text, is to be "patient towards all men."* "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any—even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."† Christ forgives the sins of His people, not for His own but for *their* sakes; and this is the true principle of our proceeding in all such cases. "As Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Long-suffering implies a noble and generous temper of mind, and is well suited to our circumstances in the Church below. Defect *here* both renders the character of our love ambiguous, and unfits us for the membership of the body. An inconsiderate, a hasty and resentful temper, is a selfish unworthy temper, because it needs from others that forbearance which it has no disposition to reciprocate. God will mete out to this man the measure of his own resentments. On the contrary, where all the members of the body make increase in love, where the attestations of the Spirit to its own fruit are kept bright; when men find within the Church, not only an exalted Redeemer to forgive them their sins, and an all pervading Spirit to heal their diseases; but affectionate and sympathizing brethren also, who have put on them, as occasions may require, bowels of mercies, kindness, meekness, long-suffering—why then, what an edifying spectacle do we not behold! How reclaiming is not this family influence; how well suited to our present circumstances! Shall we wonder that the humblest station in the house of God, has been preferred to the most exalted habitations of ungodliness? Who will doubt that where this gracious temper prevails within

* 1 Thes. v. 14.

† Eph. iv. 2.

the Church, God will have mercy upon all, and bless all, and to show to all the light of His countenance, that His name may be known upon earth, His saving health unto all people?

Another internal mark of the fruit of the Spirit asserted by the Apostle, is "gentleness." By gentleness in this connection we may understand, a susceptibility to be guided by those who may have the rule over us in the Lord, and especially when, from ignorance, inexperience, or from the prevalence of some infirmity, we may reasonably be presumed disqualified to act discreetly for ourselves. Gentleness, as an inspiration of true love, is opposed to that unruliness which is the harbinger of confusion in the house of God. That man must but lightly esteem the order of God's family, and but rarely pray for its peace, who, when from inexperience or excitement he is disqualified to act, will not only refuse to hear the Church, but drive on under the intensity of feelings which, in some way or other, have been enkindled. How often have we not seen young persons, and even some of riper years, under the full influence of that hardness to which the inspiration of true love is opposed. The superior stations within the Church, to which they are intimately related, and which claim their confidence, they disregard. The wisdom matured within the Church, and so profitable to direct, they contemn. The victims of a culpable headiness, they are destined to be tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, or by every sleight of men, or by every species of cunning craftiness whereby the enemy lies in wait to deceive. Let but some incantation of the Evil One, under color of religious excitement, seize upon their imaginations, and kindle up within

their minds its delusive fervors, and immediately their destinies are decided. In all probability they will leave the Church. This is their punishment. Neither the dignity of God's family, nor its counsels of inspired wisdom, nor its gracious sympathies and affection will avail them aught. Away they will go, unmindful of the truth,—that in leaving the Church after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, we commit that sin of which it is affirmed “there remaineth no more sacrifice, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.”* O let us remember that the fruit of the Spirit is distinguished by gentleness from all imposing counterfeits of the Evil One. It will hear the Church. It will obey them that have the rule, and whose office, under the Spirit, it is, to watch for souls as they that must give an account. “Them that are gentle, shall God learn His way.”†

Another inward mark of the fruit of the Spirit is “Goodness.” “Goodness,” as the product of true love, implies a quick and generous sensibility to any unpleasant peculiarity in another's circumstances, combined with a readiness of disposition and promptness of measure, according to our ability, to alleviate or remove it. It implies also a grateful appreciation of such sensibility, disposition and action on the part of others, in our own behalf. Under both aspects, God is essentially good. He so loved the world, as to anticipate its distressing wants. He evinced a readiness of disposition; and in the gift of His only begotten Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life, exhibited a promptness of action

* Heb. x. 27.

† Ps. xxv. 8.

to alleviate and finally to remove it. He is grateful, moreover, for any sensibility on our part to the advancement of His glory in the world, the good of His Church, the safety, honor and welfare of His people. "I remember," says He, "the kindness of thy youth."* I bear in mind the days that were withdrawn from youthful inconsideration, from its distinctive follies and pursuits, and devoted to the comfort and edification and extension of my family. Such is God's goodness, such the inspiration of His love, and such the goodness in which His Church is called on by the Apostle to continue. "I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another."†

Another mark of the fruit of the Spirit is "faith." By faith we may here understand, fidelity in the discharge of those duties which pertain to our respective stations in the family of God. Some of these duties are painful in the performance, but fidelity is indispensable to the enlightened confidence which at all times ought to subsist reciprocally between the members of the Church. "Faithful," says Solomon, "are the wounds of a friend."‡ In the exercise of Christian fidelity the sharpest rebukes, rebukes cutting to the pride and loftiness of our nature, will sometimes be required. On the contrary, "the kisses of an enemy," continues Solomon, "are deceitful." All those blandishments which win upon the feelings and which are in repute in the world, if not marked with fidelity, as occasions may require, are but so many indications of a spurious affection, and are intended, as Solomon intimates, rather to advance some private end, than to pro-

* Jer. ii. 2.

† Rom. xv. 14.

‡ Prov. xxvii. 6.

mote the good of the Church. "Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."*

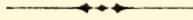
Another mark of the Spirit's work on the heart is meekness. By meekness is meant that subordination of spirit which, contrary to the incitements of pride and rebellion, submits itself to just rebuke. Rebuke is a means of grace, and is ordinarily administered by a superior; but to try our meekness, God sometimes moves and emboldens an equal, and sometimes a very inferior instrumentality, to convey it. Let it come then from whence it may, if its justness be intentionally perceived it is our grace, and certainly our wisdom, to bend a listening ear to the matter of rebuke, and a meek spirit to its reception. How essential in the Church compact is this peculiar emanation from true love. "Them that are meek," says David, "shall He guide in judgment;" but without meekness on one side, the very fidelity on the other, which love inspires, becomes a firebrand to inflame the pride and rebellion of the heart. The last note of spiritual fruitfulness, as enumerated by the Apostle, is "temperance." By temperance, he may intend that gracious habit of disposition and of action, which is adjusted in every feature to the claims of the whole Church. It is opposed to any particular excess which does not consist with the general good. In this sense it is an eminent grace, an inspiration of true love, and admits of a very diversified illustration. "To be temperate in all things," is implied in the very notion of the Church Compact or Baptismal engagement, and is, therefore, enjoined by the Apostle on all its members. In this sense the Church is eminently, a temperance society of Divine

* 1 Cor. iv. 2.

institution, having been founded of God on a principle of general adaptation to the wants and apprehensions of mankind. Whatever, in its nature and tendency, is opposed to the prosperity of the Church, is excess; and for this reason, and under the promptings of true love, ought most assuredly to be relinquished.

To conclude: From what has been said, we may gather that the primary and external mark by which the fruit of the Spirit may be distinguished from all spurious affection in religion, or imposing substitution of the enemy, is in its habitation. The fruit of the Spirit, if found at all, is found in the Church only; of which it is the inspired bond. But inasmuch as spurious affection may find its way within the Church, and there for a season at least, frightfully prevail; so other and more particular marks are given us by inspiration, that, as members of the Church, we may distinguish at all times between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error, and know of a certainty what manner of spirit we are of. These marks are joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Against such there is no law. Let our zeal, then, as members of God's family, be according to knowledge. Having been incorporated into the family of God, and received into the congregation of Christ's flock, let no man under any pretence wander into strange pastures, exposing his inexperienced and incautious heart to the enchantment of spurious affections. Let us rather pray with the Apostle, that the love of God may be shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given to the Church; that the word of Christ may dwell in us richly in all wisdom; that our love of the brethren may be unfeigned, and that we ourselves, be-

ing rooted and grounded in love, may be able with all saints, to illustrate its heaven born virtue in the divine graces we have exhibited to your view.



SERMON XXXI.

PEACEABLE LIVING.

(PREACHED BEFORE THE SALISBURY CONVENTION, 1849.)

“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.”—Rom. xii. 18.

THAT the Scripture doctrine of living peaceably with all men, is either not understood or criminally slighted, is evident from the existing state of the world. Whether we consider men under their national compact, or within their private relations—at home or abroad, within or without the Church—we may perceive how the injunction in our text, “to live peaceably with all men,” is but too often violated, if not irreverently trodden under foot. There is, indeed, with all men a fault of nature, in itself unfriendly to peaceable living; but with some men there is an additional fault of mind; and with others, a fault of heart. So far from living peaceably with all men, these turbulent beings can live peaceably with no man. They seem to have been sent into the world to exercise the forbearance of those around them. It is possible they may answer, within the moral world, the end of high winds and storms, which, in the natural world, are said to purge the atmosphere of its vapors, and to advance the growth of trees, by agitating their roots. No doubt that the

same infinite wisdom which maketh the wrath of man to minister praise, can overrule this turbulence of temper to profitable account. Certain it is, that the most illustrious instances of the passive virtues found on record, were continued exposures to provocation from those around them. It is true that, constituted as the Church now is, or as men now are, the doctrine of living peaceably with all men cannot be carried out at all times into its higher aspects of moral beauty and perfection. The Apostle, we may perceive, while he does not deny the possibility of so living, leaves such attainment open to our Christian endeavor, though the result be uncertain. "If it be possible," says he, "as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men"—which would seem to import a limit to Christian responsibility. This shows us that to live peaceably with all men, is not likely to result from qualifications on one side only; but is reasonably to be expected as the result only of mutual endeavors on the part of those who are providentially associated, and under the exercise of the passive virtues, as from either side contrary incitements may spring up. It is here as in other matters. Thus the roof above our heads, which equally excludes the burning ray or the pitiless storm, and contributes so largely to the preservation of all that is within this sacred place, as well as to the comfort and well-being of this worshipping assembly, is sustained by two walls. Defect on either side must endanger all the dependencies. It is so in the art of living peaceably with all men. The blessing implied in so living is a shelter to soul and body, and is to be sustained by mutual efforts and mutual endurance on the part of those who are so deeply interested in its preservation. Let it not be overlooked, that the blessing

of peace can be measured in importance only by the unforeseen, and often incalculable evils and miseries which may attend its rupture. But although no one party or single side effort can, of itself, secure peace, yet so far as on either side right dispositions of mind may contribute to this end, the obligation on the part of Christians, to live peaceably with all men, is made imperative. The passive virtues are the most eminently Christian; and the very notion of these involves duties to be performed and provocations to be endured. Hence to do well and to suffer for it, and to take this patiently, and thereby to live peaceably as far as in us lies, is, in a world like this, by far the most frequent demand on the professing people of God. Through Divine favor, what is not likely to be secured on natural principles, may nevertheless be gained through the patient continuance of faith. Christian forbearance has often preserved the peace which an inconsiderate hastiness had shaken to the base. Be this as it may, one thing is clear from our text, there is a limit to individual responsibility. Under the present constitution of things, we must be often content to moderate an evil where we cannot wholly avert it. As Christians, we are bound for serious endeavors—we are bound for reasonable endurance—we are bound for Christian magnanimity—we are bound for unceasing prayers; but in the exercise of these persuasive graces, we are not bound for the result. This, we may perceive, is left by the Apostle uncertain. And the reason is obvious. To live peaceably must largely depend on others with whom we have to do. We can control neither their sympathies nor concurrence in the maintenance of peace. We must be content often to do and to suffer only our individual parts and mea-

tures. If it be objected, that while single-sided effort, from its very nature, is a duty of difficult performance, the performance itself lays us open to disparaging imputations of deficiency in proper spirit, we may answer ; so much the more Christian become both the duty and the performance. Besides, our spiritual profiting will be always proportioned to the Christian graces which are called into action. There are provocations which may stagger our faith, and shake the very temple of God within our souls ; but then these are the provocations under which the eye of faith is taught most to look unto Jesus. From this source only are we privileged to draw the heavenly treasures which enrich and ennoble, while they sustain the soul. That suffering Lamb of God, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God. For consider Him, says an Apostle, that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.* But then we must be reasonably assured that we are not buffeted for our faults, but suffer for the truth of God—for the righteousness of that faith which is of the operation of God. Having thus unfolded the doctrine involved in our text, we may proceed to draw from it some lessons of practical moment to the preservation of peace, and especially within the Church. If we would live peaceably with all men, we must aim, in dependence on God, to be possessed and penetrated by a true sense of our own unworthiness. Until this primary work is accomplished in our behalf, our nature is essentially incapacitated to be governed by the principles of peaceable living. This abiding sense of our

* Heb. xii. 3.

own imperfections, wonderfully chastens our feelings and our dispositions of mind towards our fellow-men. What is more, until this change is effected in our moral frame, and the heart and mind thereby tranquilized into humility and made sweet, we are continually liable to make mistakes about ourselves, which betray us into proud contention with others. Men and women who live not in abasement before God, continually overrate themselves among their fellows. But mark the consequence. These persons, in the ordinary collisions of life, must be as easily hurt, as from their false position they are continually liable to be thrown down. Why is that man the victim of cold displeasures, if not of covert resentments? The answer is plain. He lives not in self-renunciation before God. The Scriptures abound with monitions against these dangerous mistakes. We are exhorted not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think; but to think soberly.* "To think soberly," as immediately defined by the Apostle, is to think by the rule and measure of what God has been pleased to assign us; and not by the rule and measure of mere intellectual vanity or worldly inflation. This is the kind of lowly self-estimation under which men reciprocally esteem each other better than themselves. "To honor all men," therefore, or to live peaceably with all men, is the legitimate fruit of self-knowledge, and of a sober estimation of what God hath bestowed upon us. Let this spirit prevail within the Church; let it characterize the offices which Providence requires of us, and the varied relations we sustain, and one important qualification, to live peaceably with all men, will most happily have been attained. And when

* Rom. xii. 3.

we thus live peaceably, what do we more, than fall in with the manifest indications of Providence? The higher stations of life, with their peculiar advantages, were designed in Providence and grace to sweeten with sunshine the plains below; to assuage the tumultuous feelings which, under the present constitution of things, must needs arise among contentious mortals. But if men of high degree mistake the Divine intention in their elevation; if they pervert the influence which character gives them, and, so far from ministering by kindness and condescension to the peace of the Church, scatter among the people the elements of disunion, discontent and disaffection, can we wonder at the destructive flame which might shoot forth, and involve State and Church in desolation and ruin? On the other hand, the humbler but not less useful stations which God equally respects, wonderfully serve, when properly understood, to harmonize the family of mankind, and to render each sphere subservient to the other. No truth is more evident, that as in the natural body, so in the ecclesiastical, all the members cannot occupy the same place. We are reminded by an Apostle of the gradation pertaining to the members of the same body. Neither ought any to complain, that in the arrangements of Infinite Wisdom they themselves have been set no higher; but to be thankful, rather, that they have been set no lower. The lowest place, however, has, through the wise appointment of Heaven, its peculiar exemptions, which demand from its incumbent, at least, a quiet and peaceable demeanor. Where, within these temperate and healthy regions of the Church, are to be found the distempers which so often infest the high degrees, and detract so largely from the enjoyment of life? Where are the ridiculous cares, and

mortifications, which every where torture the great, or the boundless cravings of their unsatiated and insatiable ambition? No; the sleep of the laboring man is sweet; his wants are real—therefore few; they are definite—therefore easily met; circumscribed—therefore readily appeased. Were we to seek for the best and most even aspects of cheerful content, this is the region of the Church into which our search would be carried. Now, independently of exemption from the distempers of high place which the plain man enjoys, the blessing is his, and should be gratefully acknowledged, that he has his superiors within the Church, not merely in station, character and general circumstance of life, but in weight to counterpoise error, and in wisdom to direct the hands and the feet. These, in truth, are but our public servants, under God, to devise and execute measures of indispensable moment to the good of the Church—the safety, honor and welfare of the body of which we ourselves are members. All the lower walks within the Church largely participate in the refreshing waters, which flow from these higher grades. What is more, we enjoy these benefits without sharing in the mental toil and sense of responsibility they necessarily involve. Others have expended their time, and employed their talents and often their private means in maturing a harvest, into which we plain people enter, and very liberally partake.

Let a plain man inquire what would have been the present state of the world, or even of the community in which he resides, had Providence decreed no superiors to himself in talents, station, or general affluence. Now all these seeming inequalities, when rightly regarded, tend to a general harmony, entireness, and perfection of body, which on no principle of equality could

well have been produced. A reciprocal subserviency seems to pervade the whole structure of society. As the Apostle expresses it, "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you; nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary."* Surely every member of the Church should be penetrated with a sense of the wisdom which marks the Divine ecclesiastical arrangement: he should study the fitnesses and proprieties of the particular station to which he is called, be it high or low, and cheerfully render the offices required of him. But if men impiously underrate or neglect the wise and orderly arrangement to which God hath subjected the body—
 * if they surrender themselves on one side, not to the doctrines of the Gospel of peace, but to the incitements of a proud and disputatious theology, and on the other side to the turbulence of discontent and disaffection—what have we to expect but the development of evils which must infinitely surpass all human calculation? Mark the present state of a large portion of the world. To what is it more comparable, than to that of a fleet of ships driven by fierce winds on a rough sea, in a dark night; in constant collision, the less with the greater, the greater with the less, and dashing each other to pieces? Shall we wonder, then, at the Apostolic injunction, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men"? Another grace of the Spirit, which ministers largely to peaceable living, is forbearance under provocation. "Be patient," says an Apostle, "toward all men;" an injunction which implies, that provocation in some form or other may

* 1 Cor. xii. 21, 22.

be naturally expected from all with whom we have to do: this forbearance we inculcate is the only provision which the Gospel makes to counterwork the ebullitions of a hasty spirit on the part of others. Would we live peaceably with all men, we must study to be quiet and to forbear. "Forbearing one another," says an Apostle, "in love." So also the same Apostle, when writing to Timothy: "And the servant of the Lord must not strive."* He is not to become a partisan, or man of strong feelings in any disputatious matter; but to be gentle unto all men—"patient." God Himself teaches us this lesson. He is long-suffering towards us, under all the provocations he receives. He suffers not his whole displeasure to arise. Of this truth abundant evidence is afforded in our individual histories. Sinners as we are, we are yet living men, the subjects of grace and mercy. The tyrant, indeed, may boast himself that he can do mischief; whereas the "goodness of God endureth yet daily."† In this sense we must all aim to become the children of our Heavenly Father. Besides, the wisest and best of men are subject to weaknesses, faults of mind, errors of judgment and frailties of estate; all of which, though we may suffer under their exhibition, as the Church is often called to suffer, claim on our side a charitable and favorable interpretation. God can overrule or counterwork these defects in those whom he appoints; and in so doing, has no need whatever of our turbulent displeasures. We have no right, indeed, to dispense with the laws of God, neither with the laws of the land, much less with the doctrine of Christ; but the Christian obligation of forbearance towards all men, must certainly include

* 2 Tim. ii. 24.

† Ps. lii. 1.

this much, that every man whom God hath chosen has, in virtue of his appointment, a claim on us for as many allowances as his natural infirmities may call for. And believe me, Christian friends, it is not merely our duty, but our private wisdom to make all these allowances, and to extend all the forbearance which grace may enable us to exercise; for we ourselves, as we all must feel and be free to acknowledge, are compassed about with many infirmities. And though at one moment we may assume to be independent of any man's allowances, and secure in the position we hold, yet at another time we may need all in our own case which we may have withheld from others, and possibly much more. We shall never be prepared to live peaceably with all men, until qualified by grace to exercise the forbearance which the fallen state of man requires. Nor is this qualification among the higher and extraordinary attainments of Christian people. We all know how to excuse, if not to justify our friends when they give provocation to others: well, when we ourselves are in like manner assailed, we may the more easily learn how to extend the same charity. This is a point of moment to be noted. For it is to be feared the charity of some good people consists in making allowances for those who have provoked others; but when themselves are in like manner provoked, then are they filled with all manner of resentments. These they often covertly indulge, at the very moment when they affect to be superior to them. Surely such pretenders will be judged out of their own mouths. One singular excellence of Christian forbearance is, that it represses at the outset the rise of bad feeling, and thus averts many evils and miseries which might otherwise have been entailed.

Finally : Peaceable living with all men, on Christian principles, will be greatly encouraged by the consideration, that the temper of mind it indicates is in itself a condition of receiving the forgiveness of our own sins, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. "If ye forgive men their trespasses," said our Lord, "your Heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."* How plain this teaching—how intelligible—how sanctifying to the soul! And to keep this rule ever before us, He has embodied it in His own form of prayer. The patient, the forbearing, the merciful man may, in full assurance of hope, lift up his hands and his heart to God for mercy and forgiveness. For through the infinitely meritorious blood of atonement, mercy and forgiveness have been procured for him. But with what reasonable or scriptural hope of success can we ourselves look for that mercy which, through indulged unruliness of our own wills, or the unmortified contention of our own hearts, we pertinaciously withhold from others? One important end of God's renewing grace, is rightly to affect the spirit and disposition of our minds. In this cultured exercise of gracious affection, we attain to a gracious habit, which in itself is the best, because a standing acknowledgment to God for all the benefits which He hath done unto us. If, however, we surrender our minds to turbulent affections; cherish strong feelings and resentments; become ambitious of that species of greatness which consists in crossing the merciful scheme of Heaven, or in bringing into contempt the very qualifications on which both

* Matt. vi. 14, 15.

the pardon of our sins and our peaceable living must essentially depend; if we have chosen this way of getting to ourselves a name, or of making ourselves considerable among our fellow-men, why then we shall do well to remember, that in this line of view the Great Enemy of God and man is far greater than ourselves are, or are likely to be. And his exceeding greatness consists in creating division where God had not divided; in engendering broils and disaffection where, in the communion of saints, God had cemented His own people in the bond of peace. "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work."* We may thus learn the source from whence these restless dispositions of mind have been derived. Their victims live under a bad inspiration. They do the works of the devil; and in the greatness, which is the object of their ambition, they share with him in his reward. May God, in infinite mercy, make us all meek and lowly in the dispositions and affections of our minds and hearts; self-abased; quiet and forbearing in our intercourse with men; just and true in all our words and ways; merciful and forgiving; that, as far as in us lies, we may live peaceably with all men, and hereafter attain to that perfect peace which passeth all understanding.—Amen.

* James iii. 16.

SERMON XXXII.

KIBROTH-HATTA AVAH, OR THE GRAVES OF LUST.

PREACHED BEFORE THE ELIZABETH CITY CONVENTION, 1850.

“And he called the name of that place Kibroth-Hattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted.”—Numb. xi. 34.

THIS closes one of the most instructive portions of Church History which the pen of Moses has recorded. The Apostle refers to it in his letter to the Corinthians. “These things were our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.”* The things here called “evil,” were, in reality, the good things of Egypt, the natural productions of her animal and vegetable kingdom, on which the Church, in the great venture of her faith, had turned her back. The things, therefore, were not absolutely and intrinsically evil, but by circumstance of the Church, through her obedience to faith, had become so to her members, and by the Apostle were so accounted to be. Besides, this hankering within the heart irrespectively of object, becomes an evil affection, and undervalues, if not despises, such measure and kind of good as Providence or grace may have assigned us.

Let us glance for a moment at an outline of the lesson itself. The Israelites, on their departure from Egypt under the conduct of Moses, were accompanied by a mixed multitude. The marginal reading has it, “a great mixture.” They were proselytes of the gate, antecedently referred to as men “fearing the Lord.”†

* 1 Cor. x. 6.

† Ex. ix. 20.

It is said they were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; were consequently members in the mystical body of Moses, and heirs through hope of a better country. "For they are not all Israel," the Apostle tells us, "which are of Israel."* This must be true, in every age. All have not the spirit of the Church, who are of the Church. Her spirit is one of spontaneous submission to Christ; and the spirit of her living members is, for Christ's sake, of proportionate submission to her godly rule. "Be ye followers of me," says an Apostle, "even as I also am of Christ."† Scarcely had the discipline commenced, designed of God to lower down the Church mind to a capacity of humble faith and confidence in Himself, when it is said the mixed multitude fell a lusting. The margin has it, "they lusted a lust;" importing a hankering within their hearts, evil in itself, and by circumstance of the Church, evil in its object. "Who shall give us flesh to eat?" say they. So true is it, that the carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

"How can ye believe," said our Lord, "which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?"‡ How is a humble faith, or a lively confidence in God, to consist with a heart and mind unmortified from all worldly and carnal lusts? But this is not all. This unmortified spirit within the pale of the Church, is both epidemical and contagious in a frightful degree. This must be so in every age. We are all naturally predisposed to receive its impression. Hence the good manners of Israel were soon corrupted by these evil communications. They ceased to appreciate the Divine intention in the disci-

* Rom. ix. 6.

† 1 Cor. xi. 1.

‡ John v. 44.

pline now imposed upon them. To the lust for flesh, on the part of some, was added a lust for fish on the part of others—until in time a third party arose, who yearned after all that was destructive of the country they had left. “We remember,” say they, “the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic; but now our soul is dried away, there is nothing at all besides this manna before our eyes. Would to God, we had died in Egypt by the hand of the Lord.”

Now, we might think such unseemly spirit and behavior within the house of God incredible, were not its counterpart chronicled in our own day, in the restlessness, the discontent, the disaffection evinced by those who inhabit the extreme, or so to speak, polar sections of our own Church. In either view of these opposite sections, we behold men walking on the edge of dangerous declivities, seemingly in as near approximation to foreign principles on which our reformed Church had turned her back, as will barely consist with a name to live within her pale. All their natural sympathies, whether of the intellect or of the heart, have gone back to the country which they had left. How common too, in these days, within these polar sections of our Church, has it not become, to speak with disparagement of the Reformers of the Apostolical Church of England, and of the Church herself, as though the claims of this venerable mother of us all, were to be classed in the same category with those of ultra Protestantism, or the most purely negative system of religion. Surely, were other proof wanting, the extreme opinions of our own day, in either line of view, sufficiently attest the wisdom by which these Reformers were guided.

But let us study the Divine economy in the case of Israel, for it is a standing economy. It is said, "God gave them their heart's desire, but sent leanness withal into their souls." They were not at all bettered in their physical condition, by the concession made to their lusts; on the contrary, they became emaciated in their forms, and predisposed in their habit to receive the impression of Plague, which shortly after passed over that region of country. In this way it is said, "The wrath of God came upon them and slew them." So true is it, that the Divine displeasure, not less than the Divine favor, is wont to shroud itself in a natural effect. But who were these vessels of wrath, self-fitted for destruction? They are said to have been "the chosen men that were in Israel." Officers of the Church whose function it was to inculcate on the minds of the people, and to illustrate in their own example, the subordinating principles of the Church; but who so far had abused their office, as to have become an occasion to the people of more aggravated rebellion. Surely, the Christian liberty we have inherited was never intended of God to minister unto licentiousness, but unto free and spontaneous submissiveness to a godly rule. How melancholy the spectacle here presented, where the very concession of a merciful God made to His people, should, through their headlong misconstruction of its nature and end, have proved but a ministry of death unto death—"not knowing," says an Apostle, "that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." As a perpetual memorial of this tragic issue, the place of its occurrence was called Kibroth-hattaavah, or "*the graves of lust.*" And O, how have not these graves since been multiplied! What age of the Church has not contributed to swell their number! Look where

we may, and upon the sad tombstones that stand scattered over the wilderness of the world we see inscribed, "Kibroth-hattaavah, the graves of lust: the graves of lust! Such, beloved brethren, is an outline of the lesson before us. The point we select for discourse is the mixed multitude, considered as a characteristic of the Christian Church, with their use, their danger, and the Apostolical rule for our guidance.

The visible Church is so constituted by its Divine Author that, "the evil be ever mingled with the good." "Sometime the evil has chief authority in the ministration of the word and sacraments."* Certain it is, "the evil," as seen in the tragedy just described, will ever exercise a powerful influence on the doctrinal sentiments, the spirit, the manners of those who, unmindful of the Apostolic rule to be hereafter considered—surrender themselves blindly and implicitly to be thus controlled. Be this, however, as it may, we cannot change the constitution of Christ's Kingdom. He Himself likens this Kingdom to a net cast into the sea, and from the beginning to the end it will gather of every kind. In what age, may we not ask, has the Church existed apart from these alien elements within her pale? Certainly not in the Apostolical age. "Brethren," says an Apostle, "be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. For many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ."† The passage is the more remarkable, because it attests not merely the existence within the Church in that day of a mixed multitude, but also the standing characteristic of that mul-

* Art. 26.

† Phil. iii. 17, 18.

titude. They were not the enemies of Christ, neither were they enemies of His Church; nor yet of the Divine promises made to the Church, nor yet of the hopes and prospects entertained by the Church; all these things they had appropriated to themselves. But they are described as "the enemies of the Cross of Christ." Men of unmortified worldly and carnal lusts, not unfrequently of the most unchastened ambition, men who were contentious in the very spirit of their minds, mingled a large share of presumption with their faith, and not a little firmness with their zeal. Why, under various modifications, the Church has ever abounded with such characters, and perhaps never more so, than at the present time. Look where we will, on this side or beyond the Atlantic, we see within the Church a mixed multitude, comprehending men of profound learning, of godly fervor, of rare excellence; but of little or no spontaneous submissiveness to ecclesiastical rule, rather impatient of control, thoroughly imbued with the spirit of party, marked in many an individual case, with the wildest extravagance. Now it might have been supposed, that on whatever ostensible grounds these persons evinced their incapacity to be moulded into a conformity with Church doctrine, spirit, and manners; they at least would be found homogeneous in their own principles; but the records of the Church, as well as her existing state, show that contrariety with their own Church is, in reality, the only point of assimilation between them. In every other respect, whether of doctrinal theory, intellectual sympathy, taste, feeling, or affection; the mixed multitude have ever exhibited a mass of elements as variant from each other, as all are from the standards of their own Church. This perchance may be their misfortune

rather than their fault. But the Church herself, whatever may be the allotment assigned her in infinite wisdom, is of no school or party. Moderation is her characteristic. She can have no fair representation whatever in these polar extremes. Neither in conciliating these discordances, dare she diverge from her own temperate region, or mar the integrity of her mighty trust. But the mixed multitude within the pale of the Church have their use, and the Church herself has been taught to improve it. In the first place this mixture furnishes an occasion for the exercise on her part, of the passive virtues, and especially of forbearance towards all men. These passive virtues assimilate her own to the mind which was in Christ. It is said, He endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, and the Church has learned to consider this, lest she be wearied, and faint in her own mind. We know the provocations which Moses endured, and how, under trials of no ordinary severity, he would fall upon his face and weep before God; and how his meek heart was at length pressed beyond measure and overborne, and himself excluded from the promised land. We know too, how the Apostles were tried, mingling their warning voice to the unruly with many tears before God. These were men of no school, luminaries of central attitude, influenced neither by clashing prejudices, nor partisan professions. They felt that the Church, of which we all admit they were the ornament and defence, recognized within her polar sections many invaluable properties essential to the continuance and perpetuity of her own equipoise.

Again: The Church, because of her infirmities, is subject to occasional slumber; but her adversary never intermits his vigilance. It thus happens, that through

the conflict of extreme opinions within her border, the Church has often been roused from torpor to an enlightened and impartial review of her own state. She has been made to see and to deplore the sad fruit of her own intermissions. Some important truth had been lost sight of; undue prominence had been given to others; she needs to be stirred up in her pure mind; her balance righted and her equilibrium restored. We see this illustrated in the great revival of the Church of England from her long night of secularity and lethargy. Under the influence of a corrupt domination, how melancholy the spectacle there exhibited during the last century! Any thing was preferable—aye, the most frenzied fever, to her palsied state. Her recorded characteristics at that period were a barren theology—a lax and licentious tone of morals—a secular priesthood—an untaught and neglected population—empty churches—desecrated Sabbaths—a name to live while profoundly asleep, and apparently fast hastening to death. The Church proper, considered as a company of faithful men, was represented by comparatively a little flock, which, through the prominence of the governing party, had been thrown into shade. These, not unlike to the guileless Nathaniel, these faithful ones sat beneath their own fig-tree, given up to the Word of God and prayer. But through what instrumentality was her memorable revival effected? Unquestionably through the vigorous attack of another section of the mixed multitude on the governing party. We all know these assailants by their works. In their way, it is admitted they have no equals. They stirred the national mind; and this, too, amidst untold opposition and obloquy. Though the sons of the Church, they found no congeniality whatever within her pale.

Their avenues of usefulness indeed were within, but their intimacies were without. Numbers were drawn into the rapids of their own theology, and coalesced with Dissenters; others, not unlike to the unhappy Noel, had become bewildered in the maze of Latitudinarianism; while in their final abjuration of the Church, our minds are involuntarily thrown back on the memorial which our text records. There, within the region and shadow of dissent, moulder the remains of many an earnest but intemperately-minded son of our spiritual mother. And there, too, we see inscribed "Kibroth-hattaavah! Kibroth-hattaavah!—the graves of lust! the graves of lust! But, with whatever instances of extravagance attended, this section of the mixed multitude has, under God, performed its office. It has roused the Church mind from a deadly torpor: this alone was a presage of the improved spirit and enlarged usefulness on her part, since so fully realized. But it is observable, that errors of one age find their correction by a reaction in the next. The scale which was depressed now preponderates; but eventually the balance rights and equilibrium is restored. The evangelical principles, distinctively so called, of the last age, however ultimately suicidal, roused the Church from torpor; but their peculiar tendencies, we all know, have run rank, and, under God, will find their corrective only, as they have already partially found it, in the stringent theology of the Oxford school. Battles are to be fought, but not by the Church, with either side. She has no fair representative in the field. The contest must lie between adverse extreme opinions, in equal remove from the central position occupied by herself. In the mean time, the Tractarian Theology will, under God, be performing its corrective office. It has already

done this, to a broad extent; but we may trace its own destinies in the history of its blighted champion. Having served the Church, it will be drawn into its own rapids, and over the precipice, to which these rapids inevitably tend. Alas! but too early has this tragic issue began to unfold. There, within the valley of the shadow of a corrupt Church, moulder the remains of many a brother beloved. And there, too, we see inscribed "Kibroth-hattaavah! Kibroth-hattaavah!"—the graves of lust! the graves of lust! But these antagonistic sections within the Church, though of material use, are not without dangers. In the first place, partisanship is the legitimate fruit of strong feelings. As such, they must needs be attended with partialities, blindness, disingenuousness; and by certain laws will betray a man into many inconsistencies with himself, and into many incongruities in respect of others, if not into moral delinquencies. "The servant of the Lord," the Apostle tells us, "must not strive."* He must not surrender his judgment to impetuous feelings. Neither is he to become entangled with abstruse points of theology. These, the Apostle tells us, "serve to minister questions rather than godly edifying."† In doctrine he is to show uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned. A second danger is, that extreme opinions, common to the mixed multitude, are apt to run rank and to beget heresies. Unquestionably every Christian doctrine admits of being contemplated under higher or lower degrees of concentration. But the advocates of extreme opinions, under the excitement and within the glow of their partisanship, are apt to be impelled quite

* 2 Tim. ii. 24.

† 1 Tim. i. 4.

beyond the doctrine, if not the pale of the Church, and to coalesce with those respectively to whose errors they had so nearly approximated.

A third danger is, that extreme opinion, or what we may term highly concentrated doctrine, however adapted as an antidote to its opposite in kind, yet being in itself a characteristic of party, may not find within the immediate sphere of its exhibition an opposite error on which to act; in which case it cannot but act perniciously on the health of the Church herself.

Such, though briefly considered, are some of the benefits which have accrued to the Church, through the mixed multitude within her pale; and such the dangers which must ever attend that mixture. The apostolical rule of guidance in this matter will now claim our attention. "Quench not the Spirit," says the Apostle; "despise not prophesyings; prove all things; hold fast that which is good; abstain from all appearance of evil."* Here, then, is a rule of inspired wisdom, full in its comprehension, and sufficient for the Church in all that is essential to the enjoyment of Christian liberty and the preservation of peace. The "*spirit*" referred to in this rule is manifestly the unction of office and ministration within the Church of God. Under all its subordinated aspects, it is the gift of Christ, conferred by the Holy Ghost through His appointed organs. The man thus gifted, not unlike to Judas, may fall from this gift by "transgression;" and the Church hath ministerial power and commandment to declare and pronounce this forfeiture, and to suspend its functions; or by one of her most awful judicial acts, to quench the spirit itself. But the quenching

* 1 Thes. v. 19, 20, 21, 22.

immediately referred to in our rule is not judicial; it is but too often the sad fruit of pride, whether of intellect or ambition, whereby these intemperately minded partisans, though brethren of the same household, and equally beloved by their spiritual mother, provoke one another, even to violent exacerbation, until they "consume one another;" in other words, impel each other in their respective directions quite beyond the pale of the Church, and over precipices, where the spirit within them is quenched. There our good mother bemoans the awful destinies of many a beloved son; and there her eyes become a fountain of tears, as she reads their monumental inscription—"Kibroth-hattaavah! Kibroth-hattaavah!"—the graves of lust! the graves of lust! Now, although the quenching of the spirit in one another is a permanent characteristic of the mixed multitude; yet the Church, as such, abstains from all appearances of this sacrilege. She provokes not her sons unto wrath; she brings no railing accusation against them, but endures their contradiction, and regards them with an eye of parental kindness and forbearance. With an Apostle, she can truly say, "Receive us; we have wronged no man—we have corrupted no man; we have defrauded no man."* Her aim, under this apostolical rule, is to stir up the gift within the bosom of her sons, not to quench it; to supply the heavenly descended fuel to the lingering flame; not that which is earthly, sensual, devilish. Neither under the apostolical rule does the Church despise the prophesyings of her sons. Her enlightened and equitable judgment of Scripture doctrine allows for higher or lower degrees of concentration, in which

* 2 Cor. vii. 2.

this doctrine may be rightly contemplated. What is more, it allows for the varied tincture this doctrine may imbibe from the peculiarity of the earthen vessel appointed of God to hold it. As she belongs to no school of disputatious theology, but is set for the defence of the Gospel, so her views of the broad field of Scripture truth are large, liberal and uniting. She has contracted neither prejudices nor partisan friendships. So Christ is preached in the plenitude of His mediatorial office. She rejoices, and therein with the Apostle will rejoice. But these mixed partisans would seem to preach Christ of contention. They will have His honor associated either with an undue exaltation, or else disparagement of the Blessed Virgin—either with overstatement, or degrading view of the nature and office of the Church. They despise the prophesyings which have not been filtered through and received their coloring from their own vessels. Their reading is of one sort only. Thus they confirm themselves in error, until their earnestness of statement has assumed the aspect of a blinded devoteism, and the statement itself is held by them to be irrefragable.

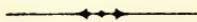
Again: The Church, under this apostolical rule, “proves all things.” Her “proving” implies a standard of doctrinal truth (this she has in the oracles of God), and also a standard of interpretation (this she has in her own formularies)—a standard which, though not proudly held by her to be infallible, is nevertheless held by her faithful sons to be the most enlightened and edifying of which the nature of the case will admit. But these partisans are ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. The glare of a passing meteor will discover to their minds some new theory of doctrinal interpretation; and presently you

shall see these polar sections of the Church under an intellectual excitement—their deep waters stirred, and their surface ruffled into foam. It would seem every other capacity had been developed within their minds but that of a quiet, hearty submissiveness to that Spirit by which it is God's will that the whole body of His Church should be governed and sanctified.

Lastly: The Church, while she proves all things by her own acknowledged standards, holds fast that which is good, and in like manner abstains from all appearance of evil. In the phraseology here employed by the Apostle, some have perceived an allusion to the instinctive discrimination of an animal while grazing in a pasture of mixed herbage. With a wonderful intuitive perception of what is congenial in kind, or uncongenial with its own physiology, it intently holds to the one; while with a singular air of unconcern it gives a clear pass by to the other. Such is the Church disposition and habit of mind. As the Apostle expresses it, "By reason of use, she has her senses exercised to discern both good and evil."* She can discern between the nutritious and the corrective, and between both and the noxious products of the same pasture; and while she abstains from all these noxious weeds, she uses the good in kind, whether nutritious or corrective, as her own wants may require. The same provident Lord who ministers food, "giveth medicine" also to heal our sickness; and we have yet to learn of a doctrinal theory held within the Church, at least by any considerable number of learned and pious men, from which both nutrition and correctives may not be profitably derived. Doubtless within the advocacy of every doc-

* Heb. v. 14.

trinal theory there may be, and often have been, melancholy instances of individual extravagance. These, however to be deplored, need not agitate or alarm the Church. Their destiny is registered in our text, "Kibroth-hattaavah! Kibroth-hattaavah!" O! let us be assured the old pathway of safety and of usefulness, is the golden mean which distinguishes our Church. Let us individually cherish a devout appreciation of her character and office as the handmaid of Jesus Christ, a witness for God, the depository of His truth, the wise dispenser of His gifts.



SERMON XXXIII.

THE GUILT, FOLLY, AND DANGER OF DELAY IN RELIGION.

PREACHED MARCH 1851.

"Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."—Acts xxiv. 25.

THIS is the imposing but false and dangerous ground on which Felix, the Roman Governor, dismissed the Apostle and cut short his awakening appeal. Indifferent to the claims of the Gospel, he could not be; but his corrupt mind with its sensual engrossment, had become so interlaced with his affections, as to defy the power even of an Apostle's argumentation. This argumentation, indeed, had exposed many a delusion under which the mind of Felix had long slumbered and had even agitated his bosom with apprehensions of a judg-

ment to come; but enchained to sensual objects, he has recourse to the pretext for delay, recorded in our text, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." Dangerous expedient; O false and fatal ground, on which it is to be feared thousands for whom Christ died, have wrecked their everlasting hopes. While considering the case of Felix, let us aim, in dependence on God, to deepen our impressions of the guilt, the folly, and the danger of spiritual procrastination. And first, its guilt. When we survey within this community, and with a Pastor's eye, so many in the riper stages of life, but who as yet by no expressive act have signified their submission to the Lord Jesus as their rightful owner; but rather have laid over this submission from year to year, quieting the remonstrances of conscience with vague hopes in futurity—we say when so many are thus contemplated, some at the meridian of life, others in declining years, may we not reasonably conclude that the delusion of Felix has survived its victim, and was never more prevalent than at the present time and among ourselves? Now we can have no conception that any of this class of persons intend to die as, hitherto, they have lived. No; like the Roman Governor, you, beloved friends, are not indifferent to the question of your eternal welfare, you cannot be. You intend, at some future period, to take up this question and in good earnest. The *present*, it would seem, is of all other times the least suited to your convenience. What with the pressure of business engagements, or the perplexities of life, or the prosecution of some favorite scheme, or the entanglements of some disordered affection, so it is, you have but little time and less inclination to engage in the serious work of making peace

with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. What is more, you have certain eager and solicitous desires which claim to be first gratified—certain day dreams of absorbing interest which you have yet to realize. Let but these clamorous appeals be propitiated, or silenced, and you intend, by God's help, to surmount every other obstacle which hitherto and most successfully may have interfered with your spiritual concerns. But, beloved friends, have you ever penetrated beneath the service of this imposing pretext for delay? Has your eye explored as far into the delusion, as the light of Scripture may have opened the way? Or have you yet to learn, that within your own breast, and almost unsuspected to exist, there resides a false teacher—a heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; whose instructions cause to err from the words of knowledge, concerning whom, therefore, you are warned by inspiration to close your ears, to cease to hear, to give no heed, no, not for a moment? What, then, must not be the aggravation of guilt implied in having leagued together with this false teacher to receive its lessons as the rule of life, and this, contrary to the secret monitions with which your own souls have been early visited! “Go thy way for this time,” says this evil heart of unbelief, speaking by the mouth and in the conduct of the misguided Felix, “for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” But how does this spirit of procrastination, in making our peace with God, compare with the Divine instruction we have received? Is there not within the bosom of every man, secret conviction of the presumption it involves? Must not Felix have felt, as every man, under like circumstances, must feel, that he was practising gross deception on himself? Of what other time,

than the present, can a sinner be assured? And even were the future put within his control, yet what time, in which to make peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, can we conceive to be more propitious, than that which, in Providence and grace, God has been pleased to appoint? Do we not perceive the impiety implied in virtually saying unto God, "Go and come again, and to-morrow I will make peace," when the submission of spirit, so essential to this reconciliation, is now within our privilege to make? Mark, too, the express injunctions of Scripture, obviously designed to confront the false teaching which proceedeth out of the heart. "Wherefore," as the Holy Ghost saith, "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts."* And again, "Behold, now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation."† And again, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest."‡ If these and like Scriptures mean any thing, they must mean this much: that salvation is assured to those only who accept present invitations, that the mercy and grace of our Redeemer fall on the heads of those only, who knowing the time, improve the opportunity it affords. But if we lay over to some indefinite future, the acceptance of Divine overtures of mercy, we are admonished of thereby hardening our hearts. We blunt those sensibilities to the Divine love and mercy, which ordinarily lead men to repentance. We do thereby but thicken the cloud which hangs over us, increase the difficulties of our case, already great; until, finally, we shall have wrought within ourselves a certain

* Heb. iii. 8, 15.

† 2 Cor. vi. 2.

‡ Eccl. ix. 10.

moral impossibility of repentance. The liability here noticed, has doubtless befallen thousands, and is one reason why we need regard procrastination in religion with fearful apprehension ; not so much the mere laying over to another season, the acceptance of a Divine call, in relation to which now is the time and the day of salvation, though this, in itself, is impious ; but we have reason to fear chiefly the moral effects of this species of impiety when indulged. The messenger of God may, indeed, for this time, go his way ; but he will leave you as another Felix, the victim of self-deception, hardened and hardening in heart. For we are taught by inspiration that the Divine overtures of mercy, when made, are twofold in their effects. Operate they must, and will ; but in the one case, the operation is a savor unto life, in the other, a savor unto death. The messenger leaves us either better or worse for his visitation. Every interview of Moses with Pharaoh, we may remember, left that intractable monarch a vessel but the more fitted for destruction. The guilt of this delay becomes further apparent, when we consider the character of condemned rebels we sustain in relation to our gracious Sovereign, and the mediatory blood, through which alone, we are approached by the messengers of peace. Light has come into the world, and it admonishes every man that sin has exposed him to the righteous displeasure of Heaven. But when we might have shuddered under expectation of the awful destiny which befell the Angels that sinned—behold, we learn that God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Sinners, indeed, we are ; but we are met, not by fiery chariots with an avenging host, to execute vengeance, and to cast us down, body and soul, into Hell ; but by ministers of

peace, by men separated from among ourselves, and Divinely commissioned to bear the most gracious offers of reconciliation with God, and of restoration to his favor. A Divine Mediator has interposed in our behalf, quieted in His own expiatory blood the claims of Divine holiness, opened a new and living way of our justification, replenished our own souls with His own light, and revived our hopes from out the stores of His own sovereign mercy and grace. Yet, when this great salvation, so freely wrought, so unmerited by us, is propounded for our acceptance; behold, we lay over its acceptance and dismiss the bearer with an insulting message to his Lord. We lament the necessity, but our worldly engagements at present are of too pressing importance to admit of being interfered with. We lament the necessity, but the lusts of our flesh are urgent, and the lusts of our eye and the pride of our life cannot yet be mortified. "Go thy way for *this time*;" you may, however, assure your Master of the high respect we entertain for His religion, and should our convenience at any time serve, we will call for thee, and hear thee again of this matter. Thus insultingly speaks the man whose breath is in his nostrils, whose days are numbered, and who, out of that mercy in Christ which he tramples under foot, is, in reality, without hope and without God in the world. Shall we wonder if, in innumerable instances, this flagrant impiety should have provoked the righteous displeasure of the Holy One? That at length, and as the just demerit of these insulting delays, God should have chosen their delusions, and at their times and seasons, have denied them any terms whatever? It has not unfrequently happened within the lines of our ministry, to be called in by some of these victims of procrastination, and at the

time of their own choosing; and on entering within these chambers of sickness and death, we have been at once forced to the conclusion, that of all times and seasons in which to seek peace with God, this time was the most infelicitous for the poor, deluded mortal who had chosen it. There seemed, indeed, as far as amidst manifold distractions could be inferred, something like broken accents of penitence and contrition; but it was the submission of a rebel, on whom justice, long provoked and oft evaded, had now laid her iron hands. It was the submission of a man who had been cast into a Roman dungeon, riveted to two soldiers and bound with two chains. God had called indeed, at a more propitious time, but this man had refused. Divine mercy had again and again seasonably stretched out her hands, but this man had laid over compliance to a more convenient season. Now the scene is changed, and O how agonizing to the victim of delay is the dying hour; how distressing to all who are linked with him in sympathy and affection! His fear has come as an inward desolation, his destruction as a whirlwind; the anguish of his soul is as a devouring flame; but alas, the accepted time and day of salvation were not appreciated by him, and now he but eats the fruit of his own way, and is filled with his own devices.

Beloved friends, Scripture and observation have long since convinced us, that of all infatuation common to sinners, this is the master stroke, to assume the responsibility of time and season, in which to make their peace with God. To appoint the time of reconciliation is strictly a Divine prerogative. It is incumbent on us to be found on the wayside, watching and praying, and in this lowly frame to seize, like blind

Bartimeus, on some passing opportunity, which a merciful God will never fail to afford to those who wait for him. O yes! when the accepted time begins to open, and the day of salvation to dawn, and the approaching feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, are beheld on the mountains, and the solemn feast is being prepared; be assured then is the time to draw near, in full assurance of faith, to improve the privilege, to perform the vow, to close in with the gracious offers of salvation, to make our peace with God. But were the guilt implied in these insulting delays less, still mark the folly. What assurance could Felix possibly have, that a season more convenient than that which was providentially afforded him, would ever occur? We do not say, that in matters of mere worldly moment, delay may not be justified by reasonable expectations of a more favorable time; for, whether another opportunity in such matters may or may not be afforded, is entitled, at best, to but little consideration; but who, without amazement, in view of the alarming uncertainty of life, can estimate the folly of deferring to some indefinite future the acceptance of that peace and pardon of sin now providentially brought within our reach! How rash the adventure where eternal things are at stake! Mark the inestimable price of that which is thus unwisely hazarded: all was bought by the precious blood of Christ. Mark, too, its intrinsic value. Who can now estimate what is here comprehended? Who can now measure the loss? And yet we launch forth all our interest in eternity on a wide tempestuous sea, exposed to casualties which, unforeseen and unprovided for, have, in numberless instances, wrecked all hopes of eternal life. And tell me, on what ground are these fearful exposures incurred?

Shall we be remunerated in the loss of our Redeemer, by the possession of those objects, the pursuit of which now displaces Him from our hearts? O! how infinitely less than nothing and vanity do not these visible shadows appear, when confronted by the realities of an eternal world! "What shall it profit a man," said our Lord, "if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* Again, it is difficult to conceive how a time in which to make peace with God more favorable than the present juncture can reasonably be looked for. If this season be found, by any among us, inconvenient, what future season, when it shall have become time present, will be found less so? If the hinderances in our way are now grievous, let us remember they are but the legitimate consequences of past delay. We remembered not our Creator in early life, we have been overtaken by the evil days for which we were not prepared, and have suffered in our best interests under their lawless incitements. But if delay hitherto has but compassed us about with many evils, how can we now expect it to retrieve our fortunes? The annals of the world, indeed, record the history of certain desperadoes who, under vain hopes of retrieving loss, had plunged blindfold into deeper and more appalling extremities. Not unlike to this species of desperation, but in matters of infinitely higher moment, is that of a man who, in a world like this, hopes by delay to find a season less beset with difficulties, more convenient than the one before him. Alas! what but more inextricable entanglements can await him? What but ruin, deeper and broader spread, can stare

* Mark viii. 36.

him in the face? Will the splendor of wealth cease to pervert the imagination? Will the charms of sinful pleasure cease to allure? Will worldly honor cease to awaken ambition? Will the pathways of life become less beset by cares and distractions? Surely the contrary may be affirmed. Every concession to irregular propension has but increased the demand. For the same reason that we now lay over, are we but the more likely to lay over again. Bring the matter home to your own experience. Some twelve months since, the usual visitation of God's chief minister specially urged the Divine claim on our consciences and our hearts. Your prevailing sentiment at that time was that of Felix in our text. With him you heard, in solemn appeal to the soul, the divine argumentation; with him you were free to respect all that was heard, and to concede much. You admitted the immense importance of peace with God; you wished not to controvert the infinite value of the soul; with him you approved things that were excellent; with him you but laid over this concern to a more convenient season. Well, another year has rolled round; what now is your experience of to-morrow's bringing forth? Has it wrought well in your behalf? Are you riper for the ensuing visitation than you were for the last? Will it find you girded about, with lights burning, and you yourselves as one that waiteth for his Lord, that when he cometh and knocketh you may open unto him immediately?* We trust in God this may prove your temper and disposition of mind. We have the best reason to believe it will be the case with some. But, in respect of some among you, common experience must fail if, so far from

* Luke xii. 35.

finding a more convenient season than the last visitation afforded, you find not a season more encumbered with obstacles than ever. As it was then, so is it now; your own heart has yet to be silenced; your feet are yet to be made "as hind's feet,"* which leap high, out of all entanglements, and over all obstructions. Hence, in the last place, the danger of delay in making peace with God. It is a settled maxim in the moral world, that forbidden objects of thought, desire, purpose, and pursuit, while they delude the heart with the phantoms of enjoyment, and persuade a man to underlook and disregard the things which make for his peace, do but originate within his breast an undying worm, and kindle within his soul that penal fire which never shall be quenched. As Solomon expresses it, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."† Eminently of this character is delay in making our peace with God. It may seem right with some among ourselves, as it seemed right unto Felix, to lay over making this peace to a more convenient season; but, without a miracle of mercy, the ways of death must and will follow in the train of this delay. After all that can be said in extenuation or excuse, the man has but deceived himself. God is not mocked. The man may justify his procrastination before men, but God will number him with the disobedient and the gainsaying, and he will soon meet in the same path with the despisers that perish. He, for a season, may only put off his creditor with delusive promises; but presently he will wax bolder, and in the end altogether repudiate his debt. Felix denied not the Lord that bought him;

* 2 Sam. xxii. 34.

† Prov. xiv. 12.

he contested not the righteous claims preferred by the Apostle; he but dismissed the messenger, and "for this time" only; that messenger was to be called again, at some season which Felix might find most convenient to himself; but when did this season come? When was the Apostle called for again? Where is the record which makes good this master-stroke of self-deception? No: Felix was soon after recalled to Rome to answer for his crimes, and, as a popular measure with the Jews, and in his own behalf at court, where their favor would count, he left the Apostle immured in a dungeon and in chains. This may show us how, in addition to other liabilities, a thousand providences may interpose, and in the course of events separate between a man and the execution of his purpose. Let a present opportunity pass unimproved, and no security of another can in anywise be had. Again, delay in religion, when rightly regarded, is in reality more dangerous to the soul than avowed infidelity. Men not unfrequently become awed in conscience by the very enormities into which their infidelity has betrayed them. A reaction ensues which, under God, issues in the cure of infidelity; but the victim of delay is deprived even of this frightful source of conviction: he flatters himself, through life, with delusive hopes and expectations; he misconceives the ground he occupies, until, presently and unexpectedly to himself, he is wrapped in some whirlwind and hurried into the presence of his Judge. O! let such among us, whose long indulged delusion our text records, be now persuaded to awake from sleep—to arise from death. "I made haste," says David, "and delayed not to keep thy commandments."* The visitation of Nathan

* Ps. cxix. 60.

the Prophet was to him an accepted time, a day of salvation. He bowed his soul into the dust and made his peace with God. Let the victims of delay among us become likeminded. Let God's appointed time be made their convenient time, their time of choice, their time of earnest desire, and of holy purpose, and with David they will fail not to reap to themselves the pardon of their sins, restoration to the favor of God, and confirmation of their hope through Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON XXXIV.

THE RICH FOOL.

“But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?”—St. Luke, xii. 20, 21.

THESE words conclude a parable spoken by our Lord, in order to enforce a reason which He had previously assigned why his disciples should take heed and beware of covetousness. “A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth;” in other words, neither life itself, nor the enjoyment of it in the least, depends on large possessions. The conviction of which truth, under the Holy Spirit, should moderate worldly desire and pursuit, and rebuke that irreligious confidence which successful industry is prone to beget. “The ground of a certain rich man,” said our Lord, “brought forth plentifully; and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do? because I have no

room to bestow my fruits. And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul: Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him: Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God." We have here presented an example of successful industry, marked with the peculiar dangers which attend this success. If we look to the parable, we shall find no reason for the belief that its subject was an unjust man—an extortioner; neither was he some rash adventurer whose good fortune, indeed, might enlarge himself, but whose failure would be attended to others with crushing disaster. No, he was laudably engaged in the cultivation and improvement of his landed estate. Neither was he indolent or neglectful in this engagement, or mistaken in his policy. On the contrary, he devised liberal things, and by liberal things he was enriched. The earth acknowledged his benefactions, and by plentiful returns compensated largely his active skill. All his calculations were not only realized but exceeded. New and spacious granaries were required for the storing of his precious fruits. In all this we can perceive nothing exceptionable, nothing but what is commendable, nothing but what reason approves and Scripture enjoins. Diligence in business is a great preservative of virtue; nor is care in the preservation of its returns less commendable. These, when combined with a sense of religion and a due regard to its obligations, will rarely fail to qualify for usefulness in this life, and for happi-

ness in that which is to come. But when the mere accumulation of riches becomes the ruling passion; when we cease to be rich towards God; when we become absorbed in the day dreams of this feverish state, we must not be surprised if, in the Divine judgment at least, we lay ourselves open to the imputation of the most egregious folly. At the very moment when the industrious man in our parable—this skilful manager of an earthly domain—was engaged in gathering in his returns, and prudently providing for their safe-keeping, he is addressed by his Maker as a “*fool*,” a man void of understanding—one who could neither appreciate his best interests, nor devise measures to secure them; a man who, amidst overflowing plenty, had famished his soul—who had said, “I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knew not that he was wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked.”* What, then, are the leading points of admonition suggested by the parable? Let these now claim our attention. In the first place, the love of possession had proved to him a snare, and betrayed his heart into sinful presumption. “He thought within himself,” when he should have consulted the oracles of God. He followed his own will in the disposal of his treasures, when he should have followed the revealed will of his Maker, whose under-agent he was. In the course of this presumption, however, he soon found his punishment: he became exceedingly perplexed on the question, how or in what way he should invest his superabounding gains. Now this worldly perplexity is not merely an evil in itself, but a fruitful source of many others. How exceedingly dangerous to the soul!

* Rev. iii. 17.

It is one unquestionable characteristic of a carnal mind ; and we know who has said, " to be carnally-minded is death."* Mark how this spirit of over-carefulness defeats the saving intention of the Gospel. When our Lord would account for the unfruitfulness of the hearts of men, under the ministration of the Word, He represents the good seed as falling among thorns ; and by His own exposition, these thorns denote the cares of this life—all those anxieties and perplexities which, without the utmost prayer and vigilance on our part, spring from worldly riches as from their legitimate source. These choke the word sown in the heart, and it becometh unfruitful. Now large possessions are not necessarily a source of painful thoughtfulness, but become so only under those perversions of their intention which the Scriptures condemn. The young Solomon was most amply endowed with silver and gold, and the wealth of royalty, as though but to illustrate the sufficiency of Divine grace in their right disposal. How rich towards God was King Solomon ! What vast outlays in the service of his Maker ! It would seem he valued wealth no otherwise than as it obeyed the impulses of a heart warm with the devoutest affection. Job was a man of large possessions ; but mark the spirit and affection of the man. The Lord gave, and Job gratefully received ; the Lord took away, and Job patiently endured the privation. His prevailing spirit was that of implicit submission to the will of his God. " Beware," says Moses, " that thou forget not the Lord thy God in not keeping His commandments, and His judgments and His statutes. Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and has built goodly houses and dwelt

* Rom. viii. 6.

therein ; and when thy flocks and thy herds multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied : then thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God ; and thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God ; for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He sware unto thy fathers.”* The liberal support of the Gospel, and its extension in the world, is the appointed antidote to all perplexity arising from surplus wealth. We must become rich towards God. Another characteristic of a carnal mind, illustrated in our parable, is the false estimate men are liable to form of the intrinsic value of large possessions. It appears that the subject of our parable had portioned his soul with the things of earth—“Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years”—unmindful that such treasure, however multiplied, is perishable ; while the soul thus portioned must survive her estate, and in the end become wretched and miserable. And this undue estimation of large worldly means is one of those snares by which the unwary are often entrapped. They estimate happiness by the measure of the unrighteous Mammon. “They call the proud happy.”† How strong, and yet how common in the world is this delusion ! But to suppose for a moment that earthly possession, in any kind or measure, can satisfy the soul or make it happy, is to mistake the nature of the immortal spirit, and to hazard for ever its present peace and future prosperity. “If a son ask bread, will we give him a stone?”‡ And yet such is the nature of

* Deut. viii. 11.

† Mal. iii. 15.

‡ Matt. vii. 9.

that false repute of worldly riches, which deems them competent to satisfy the cravings of the soul. Let us be assured, if we would find rest to our souls we must seek other "goods." It is not in the nature of things temporal to meet the demands of that which is eternal. The soul is a spiritual and rational principle. It is an inspiration from Almighty God; and in the approbation and favor of God only, can its cravings be filled, and peace enjoyed. Its capacity would mock the world's wide circumference with all that it contains. This, to the soul, would be penury itself. Consider, moreover, the soul's duration. When the earth shall be consumed, and the heavens have passed away, and universal nature shall have been resolved into its original atoms, the soul must essentially exist—everlasting as the source from whence it proceeds. What, then, must be the character of that practical sentiment which portions our immortality with earthly good? If the soul's good things are now realized in that which is perishable, what may not her condition be when these, her good things, are burned with fire? If she now cultivate no taste for her heavenly inheritance, where will be her qualifications for the sublime occupations and immeasurable happiness of the blessed spirits around the throne? May she not experience some dark aching void which she herself cannot, and Heaven will not fill, but into which the elements of eternal and insufferable anguish are destined to flow. "Son," said Abraham to a miserable victim of delusion, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things (had contented his degraded spirit with earthly treasures), but now thou art tormented."*

* Luke xvi. 25.

Another feature of a carnal mind here disclosed, is the sensual complacency liable to be felt in the possession of fortune. When the man in our parable looked around, and surveyed the superabundance which, like so many streams, poured in around him, a glow of un-sanctified complacency seized upon his bosom, and flushed the very spirit within him. Had he, indeed, amassed this treasure by vile or unlawful means; had his lands been wrenched by fraud or violence from their rightful owners; or had his laborers been oppressed or curtailed in their reasonable claims, some painful misgivings might have poisoned his self-gratulation. But there is no reason to believe that this man was otherwise than honorable in his feelings and generous in his pursuit of gain. His folly seems to have been wholly spiritual in its nature, attended in the world with no disgrace, and therefore the more perilous to his soul. His cup was embittered by no compunction; no secret rebukes haunted his imagination as he surveyed the bountiful returns which crowned his labor and his skill. His was that balmy exultation of the man of this world, who misconceives his stewardship under God for ownership in himself; the world, through which he passes, for an abiding city; who regards himself as the artificer of his own fortunes, and his own wilfulness as the law of his life. Mark his sentiments. "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease; eat, drink and be merry." What accumulated presumption! what dereliction in a steward accountable to God for the improvement of his talents! What an array of rebellious sentiments! And yet such are the thoughts and feelings which the carnal mind instinctively inspires. "If riches increase," says

inspired wisdom, "set not your heart upon them."* They are the Lord's, and to be held subject only to His claims. Now there is a grateful impression of God's goodness in these earthly blessings, which it becomes us to cherish; but as our accountability in their right use is always involved, we need rejoice with trembling—we need mingle our thanksgivings with prayer. But the complacency illustrated in our parable, under the bounties of Heaven, which recognizes no stewardship—no accountability—no rule in the disposal but our own wilfulness, is the legitimate offspring of a carnal mind; and to be carnally-minded is death. In connection with this self-complacent temper will always be found a presuming confidence on long-continued life. It would seem that the rich fool would control the term of his probation as he controlled his possessions. Both were taken under his immediate disposal. As he claimed to his soul "much goods," so he claimed "many years" for their undisturbed enjoyment. "They that trust in their wealth," says David, "and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches, their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations."† But what is the comment of Scripture on this inward delusion? "Like sheep they are laid in the grave death shall feed on them, and their beauty shall consume in the grave." Our own observation has often confirmed this truth; but it receives a signal attestation in the sequel of our parable. Scarcely had the determination to enlarge his barns relieved the mind of this worldly man from its perplexity, when behold! under a decree of that Sovereign Ruler whom he had

* Ps. lxii. 10.

† Ps. xlix. 6-14.

forgotten or despised, he is arrested by an inexorable hand, and hurried into the world of spirits. His whole scheme was overturned by one startling blow, and all his prudent provision for the flesh manifested to be folly. "Whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? Thou hast sown; but tell me, vain man, who shall reap? Thou hast beaten out the fat olive—thou hast gathered in; but who shall enjoy?" Alas! he could not tell. "Man heapeth up riches, but knoweth not who shall gather them."* Certain it is the subject of our parable did not enjoy the returns of his honest industry. His life, with his much goods, was exchanged for the coldness of death and the narrow habitation of the grave. His many years of enjoyment gave place to a few moments of distressing uncertainty, as he thought "whose shall those things be which I have provided." Beloved friends, there is practical wisdom to be gathered from the truths here illustrated and made intelligible to all. Did the life of man consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth; were it essential to our comfort and well-being, either in time or eternity, that our ground should bring forth plentifully and that our granaries should be enlarged, then something might be offered in excuse or extenuation of that all-absorbing devotion to this world, which has shaded with its delusion the minds of so many for whom Christ died. What feature in the character we have considered is not lamentably common among us? We need but examine ourselves with fidelity in order to discover, at least, some of the lineaments of that spiritual wickedness which our parable so forcibly portrays. Do we not often think

* Ps. xxxix. 6.

within ourselves, when we should have consulted the oracles of God? To what other source than this can we trace the perplexity which has distracted so large a part of our existence? Have we not often fixed a false estimate on the things of this world? endangered on their account the continuance of brotherly love? extinguished on their account the generous sensibilities of the soul? relinquished on their account the inheritance of faith and love and the pursuit of holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord? Have we not vainly endeavored to portion our souls with this perishable treasure—to make it our chief good, as we have made it the object of our primary pursuit? Have we not regarded our success with unsanctified complacency; underlooked at once our stewardship and our accountability? Have we not laid up treasures on earth at the expense of our heavenly inheritance? Have we not presumed on many days, when we should have lived with our loins girded about and our lamps burning, and as men who waited for their Lord; that when he cometh and knocketh we may open unto Him immediately? And yet under all this spiritual wickedness, how graciously has not our God dealt with us! Beacons, indeed, not unlike to that indicated in our parable, and denoting the uncertainty of life and the vanity of all earthly reliance, have started up before our eyes for warning; but our lives have been spared; space has been assigned us in which to repent, to be converted from all our idols, and to renew a perpetual covenant with the Lord our God. And wherefore, asks the Prophet, should a living man complain—a man for the punishment of his sins?*

* Lam. iii. 39.

to this world-wise fool would it not have been had an earthquake devoured his fruits and his goods and his barns and his whole domain, and left him with life only, and grace to repent of his forgetfulness of God and supreme devotedness to the pursuits of this world? But no; he perished in his prosperity; his much goods were to be devoured by strangers—at least he could not retain them—while his own impoverished soul was hurled at midnight into the presence of the Judge. And what think you, is not this a spectacle of human folly? Shall we wonder at the epithet bestowed on him by his Maker, “Thou fool?” May God awaken us, by His Word, by His Spirit, by His providence, from like delusion! May He bring the worldly-minded among us to repentance. May He preserve His Church and people always from the dangers of this present evil world.



SERMON XXXV.

THE BARREN FIG-TREE.

“And he answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also.”—St. Luke xiii. 8.

It is not the least advantage we may derive from the wise arrangement of our Church services, that no distinctive feature of our holy religion shall be overlooked. As we pass along through the ecclesiastical year, all things connected with our Lord are brought to our remembrance. In one important sense, Christ is there made to us “all and in all.” Whether we are led by

this arrangement to the devout contemplation of Christ born unto us, or Christ circumcised unto obedience to the law, or Christ baptized and confirmed by the Holy Ghost, or Christ earnest in his conflicts with spiritual enemies, or Christ suffering, crucified, buried, descending into the place of departed spirits, rising from the dead, ascending into Heaven, and there occupying a place of transcendent glory and honor; in every point of view our Spiritual Mother aims, in dependence on God and in the most edifying rotation, to determine the character and current of our religious feelings and affections, and to bring them into sweet sympathy and concurrence with the particular season or holyday which rolls round to our observance. Happy the man, thrice happy, who through this instrumentality is thus guided and led on from glory to glory.

The present is the Epiphany season, commemorating the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. Its annual recurrence coincides with the festive stages of the new year, and mingles its own felicitous sympathies with our grateful remembrance of the other benefits, which Heaven has so signally conferred upon us. The Epiphany, in respect of the Church, is her brightest season. She is made to realize the filial confidence which warmed the heart of David when he so gratefully sang, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the House of the Lord for ever."* Had there been no manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, there had been to-day no light to ourselves. We should have been numbered with the Heathen, and have sat down with them in spiritual darkness and the shadow of death.

* Ps. xxiii. 6.

But the Divine manifestations, as our text will presently show, are not to be regarded by us as something merely to be thankful for and enjoyed. To the human mind, when rightly affected, they have ever proved the constraining incentives to spiritual fruitfulness. The manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles was a light to lighten the Gentiles. Christians, therefore, are exhorted to walk as children of light, and we need be constantly vigilant, lest the light that shines, so far from ministering to our spiritual well-being, close upon us in the darkness of a blind infidelity. In this view we have more than once been led to pause at those memorable words of the aged Simeon, when, holding within his arms the Infant Saviour, he prophesied, saying, "Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against."* Indeed this great light cannot return void: it will prove, to those whom it shines upon, either a sanctuary or an occasion of offence; it will either lighten the human mind or increase its gloom; it will either return the sinner to his God, or it will drive him into deeper apostacy. "For we are unto God," says an Apostle, "a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savor of death unto death, and to the other the savor of life unto life."† Now, all the general principles to which we have alluded are clearly drawn out by our Lord, and pictured to our minds in the parable of the fig-tree, from which our text is taken. A consideration of its leading points will afford an opportunity for observations not unsuited to the Epiphany season on which we have entered.

* Luke ii. 34.

† 2 Cor. ii. 16.

If we cast our eye into the inclosure of a certain man, we shall discover a fig-tree, in the history of which we are individually interested. It had originally sprung up as by accident, in a wilderness. This was its natural situation. There it stood, in common with the trees of the wood, uncultured, unprotected, exposed. We do not say that, even in this native wildness, some fruit in kind from this tree may not be supposed. There are fruits of nature's growth, good in their way, not to be despised. There are wild grapes, and there are wild fig-trees, bearing fruit after their kind. So there are social and moral virtues which, in common with the Christian, the Heathen man brings forth, good enough in their way, never to be despised. It is in no disparagement of these natural virtues when we are obliged to say, they differ from what the Apostle terms "the fruits of righteousness,"* as truth is unlike the fiction which wears its garb. What is more common, even within Christian communities, than to find these natural virtues habitually exhibited by men often distinguished for much talent, amiable enough in their way—good citizens, on whom the Gospel shines only to be habitually neglected or sullenly repelled. We ask these men for bread, and they give us a stone. They may concede their mannerly respect, and possibly their patronage, to a cause which reasonably claims their whole hearts and the devotion of every passive and practical power. We ask for unfeigned repentance towards God, and behold! we find these men self-justified and self-approved. We ask for a lowly and contrite heart under conviction of sin, and behold! we find men of a lofty and uncontrolled nature, a stiff neck and stout

* Phil. i. 11.

heart. We ask for faith, obedience, submission, in view of God's condescension and goodness, and behold! we find, if not a despiser, yet a gainsayer, a sinner of contradiction and debate. We ask for what the Apostle terms "the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God;" we are met by a vaunting show of social and moral virtues, the mere growth of the wilderness, which they hold in common with Heathen men and Publicans. Now, beloved friends, where there has been no manifestation of Christ, true light is not to be expected. But this is not the case pictured by our Lord in the parable before us. The tree, wild by nature, is represented as having been transplanted into a vineyard—neither came it there by accident. Spiritual translation—that is, Baptism—is an act of Almighty God; an act as clearly and as distinctly within the Divine purpose, and for a gracious end, as it is possible any other act of Divine mercy can be purposed by Him or intended. How grateful in this view are the devout acknowledgments in our Baptismal Service! Hear the Church: "We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy Church." Any view of Christian Baptism, or of incorporation into the Church, which falls short of a distinct recognition, either of the Divine act and purpose in the case, or of the separateness and individuality of the soul thus translated, must serve only to generalize and weaken an impression, which it is of the highest importance to each baptized person should be preserved in its original integrity and force. As every man shall give an account of himself to God, so now his individuality is preserved

in all that concerns the beginning, progress, and conclusion of his grace term. He is called by name. His spiritual susceptibilities are measured. The talents committed to his trust are counted. The limits of his responsibility are defined.

It is observable, that whatever is spoken in our parable, is asserted of one tree, as though within the Lord's inclosure there was no other tree. So Church membership now stands and will stand in the great day on its own single, and separate accountability. How differently affected would not the minds of many become, would they but give due prominence and weight to this unalterable truth. But we are prone to generalize, and consequently to enfeeble a Divine truth, where its saving force and efficacy are made to depend on single and home application. But, beloved friends, spiritual privileges, in relation to ourselves, are not things of course. No man, because born into the world, is thereby necessarily born of God into the Church. Translation into the Lord's vineyard, we said, is a Divine act of singular mercy. It stands on what the Scriptures term "the election of grace."* It involves privileges mysteriously granted to some, and denied to others. In no case is it a natural inheritance. Hence in Scripture usage, the phrase "*Elect of God*," is but another name for a member of the Church. It denotes a man "chosen of God to be a soldier,"† and in every instance where the privilege is conferred, there accountability to the Lord of Hosts is created. How clear is the Apostle on this point. "Which were born," says he, "not of blood,"‡—not by reason of descent from any particular ancestor. "Nor of the will

* Rom. xi. 5.

† 2 Tim. ii. 4.

‡ John i. 13.

of the flesh,"—by no power of their own free will. "Nor of the will of man,"—by no counsel or persuasion of others. "But of God,"—by the power and grace of His Spirit, in the ordinary ministrations of the Gospel. Godliness is a great mystery, which we cannot look into. It is enough for a Christian man to know, that in the course of Providence and grace he himself has been called by name. Chosen of God to be a soldier—and this at a time when even he knew not God—translated into Christ's kingdom by the act and in the saving purpose of Almighty God; made to inherit promises in Christ Jesus our Lord, he is now held under accountability to God, for the improvement of light and grace which he here receives. And O what solemnity and even awfulness is not blended with a due consideration of this election of grace! Serious and reflective minds have been shaken before God. They sink before Him trembling and afraid, and are lifted up by the assurance of sufficient grace and mercy. "How dreadful is this place," exclaimed the Patriarch, "this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven."* Let no man live unmindful, as we fear but too many do, of his early election of God to be a soldier. Forgetfulness on this point, as our parable teaches, is within the liabilities of baptized persons. We here contemplate a fig-tree, changed in its state indeed, but living from year to year unchanged in the wildness and sterility of its untoward nature. It is just so within the Church, and the heart aches, whether we reflect on our own barrenness and unfruitfulness in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, or survey the number and aggravation of the

* Gen. xxviii. 17.

cases around us. We seem to repose on the external show of virtues common to all; regardless of the truth which should overwhelmingly affect the mind, that with our translation into the Lord's vineyard, must be for ever interwoven, the accountability which rests upon it.

Another ray from our parable discloses this awakening truth: We mean—the Divine expectations, consequent on our baptism into Christ, are not affected by any criminal inconsideration or remissness on our part. It is said, the Lord of the vineyard came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. This was the third year of raised expectation, and had been preceded, with like disappointment, by two annual visitations. We may perceive further, that however lightly if not unconsciously regarded by their subject and allowed to pass by unimproved; these visitations were registered, and their number was taken into the account. This is a solemn thought, and doubtless has often, under God, awakened the soul from slumber. He comes again and again. He searches; He finds no fruit. He complains not—He says nothing—He goes away. So true is it, that in all the dealings of Almighty God with sinners, however these may be allowed by us to pass without observation, there is a silent but sure process of judgment at work in our individual case, an under current flowing quietly but steadily, which bears on the soul to the destinies of the eternal world. We make light, we indulge a sportive fancy, we plunge into the absorptions of business or pleasure, we drown compunction in excess; but this under current sets steadily in its appointed course. The soul is borne onward to the great tribunal, where books are to be opened, and where every registry, which the grace of re-

penitance through Christ has not blotted out, is destined to unfold. O where is the sinner and the ungodly to appear? Where is he to appear, who now scoffs at the visitations of Almighty God—who in the natural effect of his crimes, loses sight of the Divine displeasure, who wrests the stillness of judgment for oversight or disregard of his impenitence and unbelief? One of the most afflictive spectacles which has ever swollen the heart or chafed its sensibilities, is that of a sinner awakening on the margin of eternity to an impression of his guilt and danger. His barge has neared the precipice of woe. Hitherto he had silenced in day dreams the misgivings of the soul which lead to serious inquiry; but now he is awakened to the most painful conviction of his swift and unalterable destinies.

Beloved friends, do we bear in mind these silent but affecting visitations? They come not with observation. Some of them were joyous to our hearts; others are even now painful in the remembrance. Some of them were shrouded in a providential, others in a spiritual garb. Some of them affected our outward condition of life; others reached deeper and stirred chords of emotion which had long slumbered and slept. Many may have passed these things unreflecting, unmoved, unaffected. Some may have taken impression only from their outward garb as incidents of common life. They have held them only as joys or sorrows springing out of the earth, while new scenes and rarer incidents have soon banished from the mind every vestige of their remembrance. But how differently, in our parable, are these visitations regarded! With what specific meaning are they not there presented! The visitor was Him that is invisible, unseen by the natural eye, discernible only by faith. It was God, now

shrouded in Providence, now in grace, with whom we had to do. He it was who came seeking the fruits of righteousness that are by Jesus Christ, to His own praise and glory. He it was, who surely with no unreasonable expectations came again and again to find something pertaining to that favored tree; something answerable to the grace and mercy so largely expended upon it. Now, if we turn to the Prophet Isaiah, we shall there find recorded the ground of Divine expectation in respect of this tree. The well beloved had a vineyard.* For the preservation, fruitfulness, and security of this favored inclosure, no kind assiduities were denied, no pains or expense withheld. All this was enacted, we are told, that its transplanted occupants might be called, "Trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified."† Nothing so well attests the care and fidelity of the husbandman, as fruit answerable to his expectations. His own praise is reflected in the perfectness and acceptability of a production, to which his own diligence and skill had so largely ministered. On no point is the Lord of the vineyard more sensitive. The vineyard itself is His own ordinance. The trees are chosen by His own inscrutable wisdom. They stand within by His own translating. Their culture is under various dressers of His own appointment; by laws of His own enactment and under the supervision of His own eye. Here only, if any where, may be expected the fruits of grace in a sinner, those lowly virtues which combine with the most active goodness, described by the Apostle in language already quoted, "the fruits of righteousness, which are

* Isaiah v. i.

* Isaiah lxi. 3.

by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God." And this is the view of a sinner's fruitfulness, uniformly taken by the inspired writers. The universal sentiment which here prevails, determines the mind and heart in all things, to the glory of the Master. That only is a "fruit of righteousness," which, through Jesus Christ, tends to this grand result. The mystery of salvation, we should remember, is not yet opened. It cannot be taken in, even by the comprehension of Angels. These blessed spirits have witnessed, indeed, a great movement in Heaven, in which the earth is concerned. They desire to look into these things, and to know of something that is going on; but for wise purposes, obedience, as in our own case, is the only requisition upon them. But when the end cometh, when these Angels shall be commissioned to gather together the Elect of God from the four winds, from the uttermost part of earth to the uttermost part of Heaven; when the Kingdom shall have attained its zenith, and in all its resplendence and glory shall be delivered up to God; then the mystery shall be opened, and the Divine glory in the salvation of sinners shall shine forth, in overpowering concentration, as it never before had shone. In the mean time, every movement on earth towards this glorious consummation; every tree rescued from nature's waste and transplanted into the Lord's vineyard, the extension of the vineyard itself, the removal of barriers without, and of obstructions within; every accession to the number of faithful laborers; every aspect of culture, whether through Providence or grace; every emotion of godly sorrow working within the soul her true repentance; every conquest of faith over assailing enemies; every act of confiding love; every concession of the visible to the invisible,

every transfer of affection and choice, from the pleasures of sin to the patient endurances of the heavenly mind;—in a word, every fruit of righteousness, which, through the grace of our Redeemer, adorns the vineyard and ministers to the glory of its Lord, enlivens the prospect of that glory which the ultimate harvest shall reveal. These fruits are now acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, are acknowledged by Him as answerable to His grace. They show forth His praise; they commend His wisdom; they vindicate His mercy in the translation of the soul into His own vineyard, and in the patient culture and forbearance it has there received. These precious fruits are not unlike to those early but promising indications of a future and abundant return, which is destined to reward the husbandman and to swell his bosom with joy. And beloved friends, it is this view which gives to a barren and unfruitful tree in the Lord's vineyard an aspect so forbidding in itself, and so revolting to every just sentiment. Mark that unproductive fig-tree, how it occupies a place which had been denied to thousands of equal or higher claims. Mark the visitations it has received, the concern it has elicited, the scrutiny with which it has been favored. "These three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree." It was not negligently regarded or overlooked amidst innumerable other trees. It was the object of Divine solicitude, as though the least promising indication, if discovered, would have been seized upon with parental avidity, and made to gladden the heart. Parents well understand these favorable predispositions towards their own children. Others may scrutinize them with a predetermination to find something amiss, but parental scrutiny is otherwise expended and with a kindlier intent. We seize

with eagerness on any token of promise. We see redeeming traits where others discover none. The Prophets record affecting instances of the Divine readiness to catch indications of a change in His own people. He hearkens and hears, to meet the relentings of the soul, and spies out for the bud and bloom of His grace. But in the tree before us, all was but a source of disappointment and discouragement. Not even the Parent's eye could detect a bud of promise.

Now the Parable discloses this solemn and affecting truth, that a life within the vineyard, of continued impenitence provokes God's righteous displeasure; and that when provoked, His indignation and wrath will be measured only by the fruitless expenditure of His forbearing mercy. We read of "the wrath of the Lamb,"* a very remarkable expression. But it means this much. That of all displeasures to which a moral intelligence is subject, that is to be most deprecated, which has been preceded by patient endurance. Such displeasure cannot be said to have triumphed over meekness and placability, for these have their limitations, beyond which they pass into pusillanimity; but by certain laws it rises into existence when the passive virtues have been generously expended. The Lamb is still a Lamb, but He wears the terrific aspect of an Army with Banners. His meekness is not unlike to a rock, which the assailing current had long undermined; but now it falls, and is succeeded by indignation and wrath. It is a river bursting the barriers which had frightfully accumulated its waters. Look at the Parable. That tree, chosen from a thousand of equal claims planted in the vineyard, visited again and again,

* Rev. vi. 16.

searched with parental solicitude—exhibiting an object in every view, tenderly cared for and nurtured, long forborne with and spared—is presented under the malediction of its own proprietor. The wrath of the Lamb has kindled against it. Hitherto all was still, we hear nothing alleged against the tree. We hear no complaining, the visitor turns his back and goes away. There is, indeed, a grief which mingles with disappointment, but it is silent. There are painful emotions, but they open not the mouth. How placid the morning which opened upon the days of Noah. All was then quiet, and serene, and bright, shining as heretofore; when suddenly the sun was shrouded in gloom. The sky lowered. The atmosphere became tempestuous, vivid coruscations severed the air, mighty thunderings affrighted the earth, a sentence of destruction has gone forth: “Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?” “He that being often reprovéd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”* Let the sinner and the ungodly take warning. Let the careless, the half-hearted, the presuming Christian, lay to heart these monitions of the Sacred Word. Let not the whisper of peace and safety lull the apprehensions of the soul, while her baptism into the Lord’s vineyard can be justly estimated only as a savor of death unto death.

We said that where the expectation is reasonable, grief must essentially mingle with its disappointment. Indeed, in a well ordered mind, it is by far the larger ingredient. Its subject can scarcely define his emotion. It is difficult to say on which side the preponderance lies, whether he is more displeased or grieved at the

* Prov. xxix. 1.

necessity of inflicting his displeasure. Now the principle of intercession is addressed to this mingled emotion; and its hopes of success are lively in proportion as it may be assumed that grief is there represented. We do not intercede with a madman. We intercede with a rational, good man, whose forbearance has been exhausted, and from whose lips the sentence of displeasure has fallen. Certain it is, that no sooner had the destruction of the tree been decreed, than the voice of intercession was heard pleading conditionally and for a bare respite of an execution which was righteous in itself. Not that the tree had merit, not that the sentence was unjust, but the Dresser had as silently witnessed all that had precedent in relation to this tree, and was confidently assured, that the sentence of its destruction involved the heart grief of its forbearing Lord. Now the very notion of Christ's intercession for sinners presupposes that God's displeasure with the unfruitful members of His Church is righteous, and its sentence just. It presupposes, moreover, that God can have no pleasure in the destruction of sinners, but is rather grief-stricken in the necessity which is laid upon Him. It supposes, moreover, that God is well pleased in the mediatory voice of His own beloved Son. And how touching to the heart is not this intercession pictured to our view. Mark the terms of Him, "Who ever liveth to make intercession for us."* "Let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then, after that, thou shalt cut it down." Implying that, possibly, the fault in the case may have been his own. He possibly may have presumed too

* Heb. vii. 25.

much on the general assiduity and culture under which other trees had become vigorous and productive. Henceforth this tree shall become the object of special solicitude. He will give His ministering angels charge over this unfruitful member of the vineyard. They will be instructed to spare him not for his much crying; to minister the sorest afflictive providences; to strike deep around him, in reclaiming culture; to quicken his lower roots by the most pungent applications. His conscience, moreover, hitherto an unheeded monitor, shall become a scourge to his peace, if not a scorpion. Its mysterious voice shall whisper, "Thou art a guilty, miserable man, whose exaltation unto Heaven is threatened with overthrow and interminable ruin. Thou hast despised the long-suffering of thy Maker; trodden under foot the blood of mediation; and done despite to the Spirit of Grace. Thy life shall hang in doubt before thee, and thou shalt fear day and night. In the morning thou shalt say, 'Would God it were even;' and at even thou shalt say, 'Would God it were morning;' for the fear of thy heart, wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see."* Terrible, indeed, is the record of this ulterior discipline; far more so the reality which thousands under respite have endured. And O! had we eyes to see, as God now sees, how soon might we not recognize among ourselves the tree which, under respite, has been subjected to the severe discipline of love? "I am the man," says one, "that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath.—Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall—my soul hath them still in remembrance, and is hum-

* Deut. xxviii. 67.

bled in me.”* How soon might we not recognize a sinner of one year’s respite—for whom whatever needs to be done is to be done quickly; a sinner for whom the spade is preparing that must strike deep and clear the way for pungent ministration? If that lofty nature can be broken under providential dispensation, and, through grace, made lowly, contrite and believing, the work will be done—“the sinner shall be saved, yet so as by fire.”† In innumerable instances this seasonable recovery to God has been effected. Providences, prayers and intercessions have combined to crown the respite with a blessing. The Redeemer has come forth, ere His respite has expired, and through the remaining portion of His probation has eminently illustrated the fruits of righteousness, which are, by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God.

To conclude: The last year has doubtless determined the destinies of many a baptized existence, who, through the intercessions of the Redeemer, had enjoyed a respite. That the present year will, in like manner, perform this office, no doubt can be entertained. Let no unfruitful member of the vineyard think it strange concerning the fiery trial which either awaits him or is now beginning to open upon him. The time is short. We may be in charge of ministering spirits faithful to the trust committed them. Let us hear the rod and Him that appointed it. We are now in the special hands of a Mediator; and it is said, “He scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”‡ Let us endure chastening. Let us improve its severity. Let us be truly thankful that we are in good hands; and though the body be destroyed, as were bodies in the days of Noah, yet if

* Lam. iii. 1, 19, 20.

† 1 Cor. iii. 15.

‡ Heb. xii. 6.

humble under the hand of God, penitent and believing, the soul shall be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

SERMON XXXVI.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AN AGGRESSIVE WARFARE.

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”—2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

THAT our outward course and conduct of life must greatly depend on the tenor of our thoughts, is one of those important truths which we every where meet with in the Sacred Word. We are admonished to keep “the heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”* As is the habitual tenor of our thoughts, so shall we live; and as we live, so shall we die. Hence in our text, the great contest between Christ and Belial is represented as a struggle for first principles. They contend for the heart as being the seed-bed and nursery of thought; and it is counted the great conquest of our Redeemer to have vanquished the adversary in the hearts of His people; to have subdued his proud fortress; and to have cast down imaginations with every high thing that had exalted itself against the knowledge of God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, in the name of the Lord Jesus, through the instrumentality of the Gospel, which is mighty, through God,

* Prov. iv. 23.

as the chosen weapon of warfare. This is the work which, in all ages and in behalf of thousands, has been wondrously achieved. This is the work which is now going on, by the same Spirit, in the same name, through the same instrumentality, and for the same end. We purpose, then, to unfold this doctrine of aggressive warfare implied in pulling down the strongholds of Satan within our nature, and restoring his captives to their rightful obedience. Aggressive warfare, on the part] of the Holy Spirit, is founded in the preoccupation of the heart by the Evil One; and the absolute necessity, in order to our spiritual improvement here and final salvation, that the Evil One be dispossessed. This indispensable work is the more arduous, for the reason that, although it is to be effected in us and in our own behalf, yet the flesh lusteth against it. Our nature is not a neutral power between the two grand belligerents. It has enlisted on the side of Satan against us. Hence we are described as "sinners against our own souls,"* not unlike to the captive Israelites, who when Moses, at great personal sacrifice, had made a demonstration in their behalf, sided with their oppressors, turned against him and rejected his mediation. The first conquest to be achieved, therefore, is over our own unruly will and affection. In this sense we must be renewed in the spirit of our own minds. We must become willing and obedient, in relation to the light and energy of the Gospel afforded us. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me," said our Lord, "for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."† He Himself, and as an example to us, and through the Eternal Spirit, became

* Num. xvi. 38.

† Matt. xi. 29.

a yoke-bearer—a man restrained by the will of His Heavenly Father in all the sublimer portion of His human nature; a man of meek and lowly heart, in which the loftiness of the Evil One could find no sympathy, no congeniality—in which he could make no lodgment either by artifice or persuasion, and from which, in due time, he departed, leaving our adorable Redeemer to the benign ministrations of blessed spirits, whose delight is in the meek-spirited, whether he be the Head of the Church or the humblest member thereof. Let this meekness of heart and earnestness of affection be illustrated in our obedience to Christ, as these were illustrated by Him in obedience to His Heavenly Father; and though the flesh may lust against the spirit within us, and its power be felt, yet we need not be troubled as to the eventual issue; nor need we entertain doubts as to our existing filial relationship to God. Hope in such case is reasonable, religious and holy; and though the comfort of this hope may not be without its alloy, yet in the disposition we evince to be led by the Spirit, combined with the actual surrender of ourselves body and soul to this divine guidance, we have a sufficient, because Scriptural evidence of our sonship. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.* But if we cherish within our own hearts the loftiness of the Evil One; indulge our unruly will and affection—and this at the expense of grieving the Holy Spirit—then, whatever changes may yet be effected in our behalf, we are living for the present not only within the breath of the old serpent, but also within the poisonous exhalations of an evil heart of unbelief. Our souls are daily sickening unto

* Rom. viii. 14.

death. Even now we rival in our face the ghastliness of death. So far from illustrating the soldiership of the Gospel in patient and often suffering conflict with principalities and powers, we are yet enslaved to our own wilfulness. The Spirit has not yet won its first victory. We are numbered with those who do always resist him. We are heady, highminded, yet deceived in our hearts, mistaking the state of vile servitude under which we are held, for the independence of a lofty and uncontrolled nature. Surely no one among ourselves should be ignorant of Satan's device. We have all read how insidiously he wrought on the mental springs of our first parents, and how soon they surrendered their hearts and minds to undutiful thought. We read how he entered into Judas, in the face of the repeated warnings from our Lord which that man had received. We learn, too, how he sifted Simon Peter; how he filled the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira. He knows how to adapt his suggestions to every man's peculiarity of circumstance, state, or constitutional bias. Not but that some sense of religion may interfere with this impiety; but in numberless instances these seasonable checks have been evaded by the sophistry of unbelief, or clamored down by the turbulence of self-will. These victims have chosen to think what they conceived to be their own thoughts; but in reality they had sided only with a bad inspiration, until presently these evil thoughts proceeding out of the heart, took substance in their varied forms of impiety. When our Lord refers to this condition of our nature, He describes it under the imagery of a palace kept by a strong man armed. This strong man armed is the Evil One. His peculiar inspiration habitually controls our unregenerate and unrenovated nature, colors its

imaginings, perverts its reasoning power, misdirects its judgment, vitiates its taste and pollutes its fancy. It is a remarkable fact, equally attested by Scripture, observation, and experience, that until softened by the grace of the Gospel, these sublime portions of our nature are proudly exalted in their genius against the knowledge of God, and instinctively evade or resist all that tends to our spiritual recovery. Now this perversion of the mind and heart is a dangerous state in which to live, and a frightful state in which to die. It is contrary to our better light, and is therefore represented in Scripture as our condemnation. There are times and providences under which it pleases God both to soften the heart and to arm His Word with extraordinary pungency. Its discoveries are clearly perceived and its power is felt. It might well be supposed, that under these stringent applications of the word of truth, these captives would be quickened to repentance and faith, and would flee for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them. Indeed thousands have done this in every age of the Church. The conversions recorded in the New Testament are but the records of beings like ourselves coming to a better mind, through the grace of the Gospel; no longer espousing the cause of the Evil One against their own souls, but rather in special acts of obedience to the Gospel, manifesting a new heart and a new spirit. But from the same record we learn that Satan has resources within our apostate nature commensurate with the demand. He may content himself with this man's insensibility, indolence, or indifference; or with that man's habit of delay; but there are certain chords within our frame which, when touched by the Evil One (and he knows both the time when, and the

place where), respond in sympathetic accord with his wicked purposes. Christian people, it is true, have learned to master the devices of Satan. They allow them no weight in their decisions. But the unrenewed live habitually under these unholy inflammations of the heart, nor once suspect either their character or their source. Others, when closely pressed by the word of truth, swell, under the touch of the Evil One, into a kind of proud defiance; others settle down into gloomy displeasures. So also we read how others, under the resistless appeals of the Gospel, which brought their condition to a crisis, were nevertheless successfully touched by the Evil One on certain springs, when, so far from exhibiting a better mind, they became infuriated, not merely despising the prophecies, but quenching the Spirit in the messengers that were sent unto them, by putting them to death. Hence our Lord's most affecting apostrophe to Jerusalem, "O thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee!"* Now the Apostle tells us he was not ignorant of Satan's devices. He had discerned the masterly skill of that subtle foe exerted upon those who had yielded their faculties, their power of thought, their fancy and their feelings to that bad inspirer. While he commiserated the blindness and inconsideration of his fellow-men, he was nevertheless prompt and unsparing in detecting and exposing the frauds which were practised upon them. "We wrestle," says he, "not with flesh and blood."† He had quarrel with no man; "but we wrestle with principalities and powers, with spiritual wickedness in high places." He quarrelled with the dominant usurper—with that mas-

* Matt. xxiii. 37.

† Eph. vi. 12.

ter spirit behind the throne. While the salvation of Israel was the burden of his heart's desire and prayer to God, he knew for a certainty that this salvation could never be effected while they continued as they were in tame servility, spell-bound in every faculty and power under horrible incantations. They must be enlightened by the Gospel; they must awake; they must arise; they must be turned from the power of Satan unto God. The times of a man's ignorance God may wink at; but when the beams of the Gospel have reached his spiritual understanding; when his captivity is disclosed to his own vision, and the position of the high contending powers is defined, and the great salvation is preached in the name of the Lord Jesus, and liberty to the captives proclaimed and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, then a tame subservience to foreign misrule assumes, in moral judgment, a very different complexion. Herein is the condemnation: not that the times of a man were those of ignorance, but that light is come into the world, and men have hated that light. But the question may arise with some—If our nature, in all its sublimer portion, be thus preoccupied with evil, and kept as by a strong man armed; if our natural springs of thought are under his control, so that we have no sufficiency of ourselves to think any thing good as of ourselves, but have become mere instruments of a spiritual misrule; how, under these circumstances, is the Gospel to approach us, much less achieve its conquests in our behalf—to what remaining portion of our nature can the delivering power appeal? Now, doubtless there is much within the operations of Divine grace beyond the limits of our comprehension. The ways of God are past finding out. But under the Scriptural intimations

afforded us we may answer, That as far as our own distinctive nature is concerned, the Gospel has no appeal whatever, and addresses none. This nature, we are told, discerneth not the things of the Spirit, neither can it know them;* that it is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be.† Whether the Gospel pipe or mourn, its notes can find no admission where the strong man armed keepeth his palace. But we read of a certain light which shineth in a dark place; so also of a certain light shining in darkness, and the darkness comprehending it not;‡ so also of a certain light called the true light, which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world; so also of a certain grace of God, which bringeth salvation, having appeared unto all men.§ To say the least, here are intimations afforded us of what the Church terms “preventing grace;”|| something divine which precedes the approach of the Gospel among a people, and which God puts into every man’s heart. For God would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. The Gospel, therefore, is not left without a witness in every man’s breast. There is put within our moral frame a spring of thought, deeper set and less comprehensible by us than are all those natural springs which Satan controls. The Gospel appeal, therefore, is not to a man’s wits, neither to his natural taste, fancy, educational prejudice or feeling; but to that within a man’s breast which is of the operation of God. When its appeal touches, it touches the noblest, yet the most mysterious chord within the soul. And the response from this source is of such authority to the man, that though the Evil

* 1 Cor. ii. 14. † Rom. viii. 7. ‡ John i. 5, 9. § Titus ii. 12. || Art. x.

One would have him evade its force, or cry it down, yet he can neither gainsay nor resist it. "My sheep hear my voice,"* said our Lord. And all men every where would hear and obey it—for God commandeth all men every where to repent—were it not that they choose to indulge an evasive spirit, or quench the silent but impressive testimony of God. †

We read how, under the preaching of the Apostles, tumults were raised; but what does a tumult prove, but that the natural springs of men are under Satanic control. Others, we learn, savingly believed. They resisted the devil and all his outcry, and presently he fled from the power they evinced, and left them with open hearts to the inward testimonies of the Holy Ghost. In all these narratives we are taught that a habit of close, calm, and serious thought, under which the Spirit of God is permitted to bear his testimony to the Gospel we hear, and to operate faith in our hearts, is of indispensable moment to us all. Let us be assured the work of grace, which the unrenewed man especially requires, is needed by us all. We have not as yet trodden down Satan under our feet. His control is yet perceivable in our thoughts and imaginations; his enchantments still cause us to err from the words of knowledge; much sacred truth is yet evaded or clamored down. A general view of our circumstances will convince all who take it that natural springs of thought are still cherished among us and allowed to influence the conduct of life. Mark how broad and comprehensive are the terms employed in our text. Pulling down strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,

* John x. 4.

bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Beloved friends, let us not sit down contented with any present attainment, but rather humbly and devoutly aim to seek and to find from God "the spirit to think and to do always such things as are right, that we who cannot do any thing that is good without Him, may by Him be enabled to live according to his will." As the subject admits of a general application to us all, so at this time it admits of a special application to the circumstances of those among us who are called to the obedience of Christ in the holy rite of Confirmation. Doubtless, in the case of some among us, much evasive thought, much senseless clamor, has hitherto opposed their good desires and thwarted their performance of this duty. Should there be such, may we not ask, what does all this prove but that, however unconsciously to yourself, you, beloved friend, have been practised upon by your spiritual enemy, and made a sinner against your own soul? Has the inspiration of the Holy One discouraged your obedience to himself, or has this discouragement arisen from thoughts founded in evil suggestions? "I am resolved by the grace of God," says good Bishop Beveridge, "to stop every thought at its first entering into my heart, and examine it, whence it is and whither it tends." And may we not ask, if all your thoughts, and especially at this juncture, were subjected to this scrutiny and ruled by this judgment, what would soon become of those hinderances in the way of duty which have hitherto been allowed weight, and have unfavorably affected your decisions? Is it not a humiliating thought, that all that tumult within the heart, under which the Divine testimony has been overborne and so large a portion of your probationary existence run

to waste, may be thus accounted for? You have yielded the best portion of your nature as an instrument to be touched and controlled by your sagacious enemy. And how unfriendly to the soul has not been the tenor of your thoughts. Whither do they tend? If the past be a fair index to the future, then what have you to expect of a line of thought which has served but to give the world, the flesh, and the devil, an advantage over you, and to lay you open to the sufferance of new frauds and oppressions? "Get thee hence, Satan," said our Lord, "for thou savorest not the things which be of God, but those which be of men."*

Now, that the rightly receiving of Confirmation is within the obedience of Christ, referred to in our text, no doubt can be reasonably entertained. Our Lord himself, after his Baptism, devoutly received his Confirmation by the Holy Ghost, through a visible symbol. The record of St. Luke, of this interesting portion of our Lord's history, will be ever worthy of our most serious regard. It is thus narrated by the Evangelist: "Now, when all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the Heaven was opened and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape, like a dove, upon him. And a voice came from Heaven which said, Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased."† The praying of our Lord, subsequent to his Baptism, here referred to by the Evangelist, if we may conclude from the answer it received, as well as from our Lord's general remark, that God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him, was an invocation of that blessed Spirit in its manifold gifts and for our sakes. Among these gifts

* Mark viii. 33.

† Luke iii. 21, 22.

were, doubtless, comprehended all the endowments which we ourselves individually need, and which, in the holy rite of Confirmation, it is the inestimable privilege of a meek and lowly heart to seek after in full assurance of hope; for Christ, we are told, was manifested as receiving the Spirit, that he might be believed on by us as giving the Spirit. "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost."* This is our personal interest in the recorded event. We need to be reminded continually, that, in the economy of redemption, the Son of God is manifested, not according to the high and ineffable relations of his divinity, but as the man Christ Jesus, in full sympathy with our own nature, as our forerunner heavenward; the captain of our salvation, after whose example, and in whose footsteps, and under whose Spirit it is our Christian profession to walk. We contemplate him in the Gospel, not in the splendor of his inherent glory, but as a man of meek spirit and of lowly dispositions of mind; a man of spiritual sorrows and acquainted with grief; a man needing the ministry of the Spirit and the ministry of angels to comfort and invigorate his heart—a praying man. He is manifested to us as a man invoking the Spirit after his Baptism; as a man receiving the Spirit through a visible symbol for his peculiar office within the Church. This is the confirmation our spiritual necessity requires, and which it is our privilege to receive. The mere symbol or visible sign of communication, in itself, is but a token and pledge. In our Lord's case, the symbol was in bodily shape like a dove; in the Apostles' case, it was like unto "fiery cloven tongues."

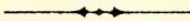
* John i. 33.

Under the settled state of the Church it is the laying on of the Apostles' hands, and through their successors, even unto the end of the world. But the necessity in every case, and in its measure, is the same. The Spirit itself is the same. The qualification to receive the Spirit is every where, at all times, and in every instance, the same. Our lofty nature must be pulled down. It falls not of itself. All those imaginations, all those high things which have exalted themselves against the knowledge of God, must be cast down; they are our old oppressors, whom God hath delivered into our hands. Every opposing thought must be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. He is our rightful sovereign. We must be a baptized people, a praying people, an expecting people, a waiting people, a people invoking the Spirit under an affecting sense of our spiritual poverty. Now, the time would fail us to enumerate the strongholds of Satan: the lofty imaginings, the high things which in our apostate nature exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, and which, if not peremptorily rebuked, will most certainly resist the Holy Ghost. Let but Satan touch their respective chords, and immediately, as if by a wicked charm, your pride of consistency, your shame of the Cross, your sensitiveness to an ungodly world, your earthly aims and aspirations, your habit of sensual gratification, your unruly will and affection, your weaknesses, and your vanities, will all start forth to do homage to his power. To you, my young friends, the conquest implied in our text will be one of comparatively easy acquisition. Your natural springs, thus far mature and active, are but little more than those which respond to the seductive pleasures of an alluring world. Let the sense of religious obligation prevail; let the

force of those motives of everlasting happiness and misery, the awful sanctions of the baptismal covenant, incite your cheerful obedience. But there must necessarily be some among us who, from whatever cause, have failed to improve the more felicitous stages of early life. To you, beloved friends, the receiving of Confirmation, if indeed it be ever received by you, must necessarily be marked with the holy violence implied in our text. The work before you, from time misspent and habits superinduced, must needs be one which will incite the most vigorous resistance of your spiritual foe. In virtue of long and undisputed possession, he claims the sublimer portion of your nature as his own goods. These goods have long been held in peace. To contest his claim at your period of life, and in the face of all your spiritual enemies, can scarcely fail to incense the rage of Satan, and provoke his utmost hostility. He will touch every natural spring of thought with invigorated purpose. It is recorded of Pharaoh, on the revolt of captive Israel, that he made ready his chariot and took his people with him. "And he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them."* What became of this formidable array in the pursuit of Israel we may read in the song of Moses; but, spiritually, it may disclose to your view the genius of that power by which your destinies have been hitherto swayed, and which, in so many instances of protracted captivity, has intimidated and overawed all the ventures of an incipient faith. But the time now is, yet soon will have passed for ever, when the dead may hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear may live. The resplendent

* Ex. xiv. 6, 7.

banner of the Lord Jesus still waves high. The call to liberty is yet proclaimed from the house-tops. The day-star within your own breast emits a golden lustre; your weapons are mighty through God, and your work is within and before you. In the name of the Lord of Hosts, seasonably begin that work. Pull down the strongholds of your imperious foe. Cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God. Bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Let that glorious conquest be yours, in which one shall chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight. Believe me, whatever may be affirmed of the young, your case, my older friends, is within that aspect of spiritual conquest in which the kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent only shall take it by force.



SERMON XXXVII.

THE LOST SHEEP FOUND AND COMFORTED.

“And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.”—St. Luke xv. 3.

THE Gospel, in all its parts and provisions, is a manifestation in Christ of the Divine condescension and mercy in behalf of sinners. But the Scribes and Pharisees, who in Scripture represent the self-justifying principles of our fallen nature, were able neither to appreciate nor understand this saving manifestation. They, for themselves, disclaimed the character of sinners.

They trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. One chief exception, indeed, taken by them to our Lord, was grounded on the kindness He evinced in His intercourse with those whom they themselves so superciliously regarded. "This man," say they, "receiveth sinners and eateth with them."* It is observable our Lord does not repel the charge; neither on this occasion does he disturb the ground of false self-estimation from whence it proceeded. He rather tacitly concedes to the Pharisees the character they assumed; while in three consecutive parables—the first, of the lost sheep, with which our text is connected; the second, of the lost piece of silver, which was so diligently sought; and the third, of the prodigal son, who was so happily restored—our Lord draws from their own premises a full vindication of the Gospel they condemned. They were judged in these parables out of their own mouths, and silenced on the ground they themselves had taken. To understand aright, therefore, these three parables, we must keep in view the false position which the Pharisees had arrogated to themselves, and the purpose of our Lord to derive from it, and for their own conviction, a vindication of Himself. For though it be conceded that they themselves had kept their first estate, it by no means followed, that the fallen multitude around them should be denied their sympathy and commiseration; though in their own case no mediation were required, it by no means followed that all were thus circumstanced; though in their own unbroken fealty and affection, no special convivialities were called for, yet it by no means followed that the recovery of a son that was

* Luke xv. 2.

lost was not in itself an occasion of family gratulation and joy. Surely in such case it was "*meet*," every way fitting the occasion, that all the members of the family should make merry and be glad. The Holy Father himself rejoices in the recovery of sinners. His Eternally Begotten was manifested in the flesh, to seek out and to save them. The Holy Ghost was sent into the world to convince and to convert them. The holy angels deeply sympathize in their repentance; all Heaven is moved in responsive gratulation. How, then, is it that but one note of harsh dissonance should be heard; and this proceeding from men as uncorrupt as they, the Pharisees, were reputed to be? One of two conclusions would seem to be unavoidable. Either mercifulness is not an attribute of true holiness, which all Heaven declares it to be; or else their claims to be holy were more ambiguous than they themselves had been led to suppose.

The three parables embrace, in general character, every diversity of sin under which men have been estranged from God. For all sin is resolvable into one or another of three classes. Either it is the sin of weakness, consequent on separation from God, as when a sheep is first enticed from the shepherd, then becomes a prey to the devourer; or it is the sin of surprisal, as when a piece of silver is casually dropped; or it is the sin of rebellion, as when a minor breaks covenant with his father's house, and begins his career of profligacy and ruin. But as under the broad stipulations of the New Covenant, all manner of sin may be forgiven, so the sympathy evinced in these parables, in behalf of that which was lost, whether through weakness, surprise, or rebellion, shows the kindness and love of God our Saviour, who would have all men to be

saved. With this general exposition of the three parables, we proceed to notice the points of interest comprehended in the first. Among these, the subdued aspect under which a sinner, now in his place, penitent and believing, is regarded in the covenant of grace, is striking and affecting. A veil is thrown over him, which conceals from our view the aggravations of his case. It would seem that all holy intelligences had lost sight of his criminality and pollution. With whatever displeasure regarded while in the heedlessness of his career, yet now that the grace of his Redeemer has sought out and found him, humbled and returned him, the whole aspect of his case is changed. Mark the descriptive term in our text, how softened!—"my sheep which was lost"—perhaps *one*, on many points of value, known only to the Shepherd, the most promising of His charge. This feature in the covenant of grace is tender and affecting. It has happened to the bosom of many a parent to burn with unmingled displeasure, while contemplating the reprobacy of a son, who at an earlier stage had excited the best hopes and most sanguine expectations of usefulness in the world. But behold! the wanderer is recovered. He appears in place, at the feet of an injured parent, broken in his moral frame, inwardly and outwardly abashed, and, as by some inexplicable process in his father's estimation, the whole aspect of his case is changed. We hear not a word of reproach. A veil has covered all his sins. Once the indignant feeling had absorbed all others, *now* the sentiment of paternal commiseration prevails. A Pharisee, indeed, standing by, unable to appreciate the treasure implied in a broken and contrite heart, might be disposed to break the bruised reed by a recital of profligacies, showing up their aggravations with

unsparing fidelity. "Oh no," cries the Father, "enough; this is 'my sheep which was lost.' This is an heir of frailty that had gone astray, but is now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of his soul." This subdued aspect, under which a sinner in his place, now contrite and believing, is beheld in the covenant of grace, is discoverable in the descriptive imagery employed in all these parables. Sins of surprise, however indignantly regarded while justified and sustained, are now cast into the depths of the sea. Their victim, as recovered to God, is described under the extenuating imagery of a piece of coin which, from a number of others, had casually dropped. So also the most aggravated of all sins—an apostacy from the Church, in deliberate and progressive rebellion, aye, carried out, as portrayed in the parable, in all its frightful horrors—is nevertheless, on the recovery of its victim, summed up in these extenuating terms: "This, my son, was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found." There is a charity within the Gospel which applies to a sinner in his place, now penitent and believing, and which covers from its own vision all that was flagrant in his guilt. It lays a benign hand on him, as that of Ananias on the converted Saul, saying—"Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost."* There are many blessings for the future, but no reproach for the past, within the stores of God's mercy in Christ Jesus our Lord. The point of interest within the parables we have considered is elsewhere in Scripture matter of express declaration. Thus the Prophet Ezekiel: "But

* Acts ix. 17.

if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All the transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him.”* The charity of the Gospel covenant covereth from its own view a multitude of sins; and it is observable that whatever character may be affirmed of the outrages perpetrated by Saul on the fold of the Redeemer, yet nowhere after his conversion do we find an allusion to these persecutions in any condemnatory sense whatever. He himself indeed refers to them, and doubtless referred to them unto the end of his days. They were written within his heart with a pen of iron. They gave habitual complexion to his penitential soul. The remembrance was grievous unto him. “I am not meet,” we hear him exclaim, “to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.”† But the record on his own heart was the only remaining one. Every where beside, whether in Heaven or earth, his sin was blotted out. It, indeed, had been as scarlet, yea, like crimson; but within the covenant of grace, and on his conversion, it had assumed the whiteness of snow.

Now it might be apprehended by some, that this extenuated aspect under which the past sins of men now in their place—penitent and believing—are regarded, was liable to be perverted to mischievous account. What is lodged only within the Gospel of the grace of God, and available only to the penitent believer in his place proper, might be seized on, they apprehend, by a different character, and very differently circumstanced. Certain it is, that sin is but very leniently regarded by

* Ezek. xviii. 22.

† 1 Cor. xv. 9.

thousands who live under its habitual control. They hold it as something which may be forsaken by them at pleasure, repented of, be forgiven of God, and obliterated from the book of His remembrance. What is more, it is their intention, at a more convenient season, to put away the evil of their doings—to return to their position in their Father's house. They anticipate the kindness and love of God our Saviour, which apply only to the actual return of a sinner under the warm and generous incitements of his penitence and faith. Doubtless this, or some other perversion of God's mercy in Christ, is very possible; but what does this prove? Does it prove that what the Scriptures have affirmed of the penitent believer is the less spoken? Certainly not. What is written, is written. It proves this: that the heart of man is of that desperate wickedness which, unrebuked, is capable of perverting to his own ruin one of the most powerful incentives to personal holiness of which our nature is susceptible. No doubt can be entertained, that if left to ourselves and to the plottings of an insidious foe, we should pervert the whole Gospel into a motive to continued rebellion. We need continually to be reminded of such scriptures as these: "Take heed that ye be not deceived;"* and again, "God is not mocked;"† so also, "The Lord knoweth them that are his;"‡ and finally, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that also shall he reap."§ Besides, where do we read, or from whence are we authorized to infer, that however leniently regarded the sinner may be when penitent and believing, his sins are to be thus regarded by himself? On the contrary, the sense of God's mercy in the forgiveness of sin, is the

* Luke xxi. 8.

† Gal. vi. 7.

‡ 2 Tim. ii. 19.

§ Gal. vi. 7.

chosen instrument of perfecting our repentance. Never is the heart of man so truly broken and contrite, or the hatred of sin so strongly felt, as when imbued with the sense of God's pardoning love. But if we leniently regard our sins, then on this very ground have we reason to fear that our sins are yet registered against us. We have seen how St. Paul always regarded the sins of his ignorance and unbelief; how from this source he derived and carried through life the humiliating sense of his unworthiness. So also the subject of one of our parables, how he felt and acknowledged his own unworthiness of the high privileges to which nevertheless he was restored. Never was his heart so deeply affected, as when introduced to the new enjoyment of blessings he had once despised. The true doctrine would seem to be, that in the covenant of grace the penitent is leniently regarded, that he himself may contemplate his sins in stronger view and with deeper contrition.

But there is a second point of interest in our parable which merits attention. How affecting the picture of Christ, the Good Shepherd, bearing home his lost sheep! Behold that emaciated lost one, which the wilderness had scathed! Is it *driven* along, or has it been *entered* merely on the homeward path, and left exposed to innumerable casualties? or has it been left to devise new paths for its feet, or to provide its own sustenance by the way? or to encounter single forced, the evils and dangers which beset the way? No; the picture there presented to our minds is any thing whatever, rather than a circumstance so cheerless in itself and so hopeless in its issues. The first object which arrests the eye, is the Shepherd himself wending his way homeward through the wilderness, by a pathway of his own.

Within his embrace and reclining on his shoulder, with heart palpitating to heart, an object is discovered which, from among a hundred others, had wandered from the fold; was missed by the Shepherd; was sought out by him; was found; was incorporated, as it were, into his own person. Now they journey homewards together. "Abide in me and I in you,"* is their one reciprocated sentiment and affection. The homeward path is known to the Shepherd only. The pioneering is his; so is the brunt of endurance; so is the burden of his charge; so is the responsibility; so the outlay of grace, the glory in the issue. "Abide in me" is the sum and measure of his requirement on the object of his care. Now it requires no inspired interpreter to draw from this scene its virtue, and to apply it in comfort to our hearts. So diversified and reciprocated are the ties and bonds which in this case bind the burden to the bearer and the bearer to his burden, that the final safety and well-being of that recovered wanderer is within the brightest and most cheering irradiations of hope.

If, through some inherent infirmity of its own, the recovered wanderer should, for a moment, relax its hold, it would still be sustained by a covenanted hand. If on the contrary, and for the trial of faith and affection, the Shepherd should seem to be forgetful,—his mercy to be clean gone,—his face to be hidden amidst clouds and darkness,—the recovered wanderer, troubled in spirit, would but cleave the more closely and indissolubly to the centre of its repose.

And now, as a third point of interest, let us inquire—Whither is the home towards which the Shep-

* John xv. 4.

herd with his burden wends his way? Is this home to be found in any state or condition possible within the present life? The question needs be answered discreetly. That the home is not here realized in the fulness of its blessing, nor yet in any considerable share of this blessing, none will be disposed to deny; but that the Gospel discloses in the Church state the doorway and lower place of this enduring home, we, on Scripture ground, most confidently assert. It is true, we here see but in part; still, the kingdom of God is preached unto us; so is the great mystery of a present admission to its privileges and immunities, and to foretastes of its reversionary joy. We have come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. Our present citizenship pertains to it. The small things of our day are yet heavenly things, and not to be despised, for they comprehend the elements of a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. It is, therefore, the present concern of the Shepherd to bring the wanderer home, though, from circumstance, he can now but put him into the low place of his Father's house. We know who it is that only can rightly and truly return the sinner to that house. We know on whose shoulder he has come hither—who it is that giveth repentance and the remission of sins. But this low place of the kingdom of heaven, implied in the Church state, is not the place where the Shepherd either lays down his burden or eases himself of his adversaries. These adversaries are spiritual in their nature. They pursue the Church militant as the monsters of the deep pursue for carnage the noble ship. The Shepherd's office it is to defend the Church; to bear his charge onward, through the valley and shadow of death—through the abode of disembodied spirits to the judgment of the great day,

and through that fiery trial to the glorious award of eternity. There, within the walls of the celestial city, upon the golden pavement, he will lay down that precious burden, sanctified by his Spirit and meet for his inheritance. There alone will he call together his friends and his neighbors, saying unto them: "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." In the mean time, it is the privilege of every baptized believer, who, in communion with the Church, realizes the providence of his Divine Shepherd, to rejoice in the Lord always, as one borne along to higher and more felicitous departments of the kingdom of God. Well may his penitent soul now exclaim: "Hitherto hath the Lord helped.* Here to His mercy-seat has my frail enfeebled spirit been privileged to come; often upheld when sin had relaxed my own grasp; often recovered when fallen; cheered under my tribulations and sustained amidst circumstances of terror and dismay." Now, the impression from the parable is deepened when the singleness or individuality of the charge is taken into the account. This is another point of interest. All that is pictured in our parable is affirmed of one sheep that was lost. What an impression of the individuality of the soul, is not thus created? It is not unlike to that which the Scriptures create, when they record the call from Heaven of a man by name, leaving on the mind of that man an unwithering impression of its own singleness in the sight of God. Yes—we have wandered from the fold of God, as individual spirits; we have been missed from our place, as such, sought after, found; incorporated into our Redeemer; borne along thus far; are still preserved; and so independently,

* 1 Sam. vii. 11.

of all others, as though, besides our individual soul there was not another within the limitations of Divine mercy. We are prone to confuse our individuality in the multitude around us, unmindful that Heaven, in its condescension, has called us by name. As individuals, we are called to repentance. We believe the Gospel, as such; are baptized into Christ by name; receive confirmation one by one; we draw near individually and take the holy sacrament, to our comfort. We shall die, moreover, as our friends have died before us, one after the other, entering the world of spirits in the solitude of our own existence.

My Christian friend, whatever your earthly circumstance or condition may be, or your impressions of self-insufficiency to reach your enduring home, it is a cheering thought, inspiring to the soul, that the companion of your pilgrimage heavenwards is the blessed Jesus, on whose sufficiency of grace your spirit, as on the wings of an eagle, has mounted up, and is now borne along, through clouds and darkness and stormy winds, never to be laid down until her heavenly habitation is attained. This earthly frame, indeed, must decay; but your spirit, now "abiding in Christ and Christ in you," is privileged to enjoy her covenanted place. Onward she may move, fearing no evil, for she is the object of the Good Shepherd's care. But, remember, there is a peculiar spirit, which, as so much incense, rises out of this favored state, acceptable to Him who bears the burden. "Keep yourselves," says an Apostle, "in the love of God."* Count that motion of the heart a deadly thing which would do despite to the Spirit of so much grace. On nothing within, or of yourselves, can you

* Jude 21.

safely depend. Your defence is lodged in the unslumbering care of the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. Treasure this defence. Let it be recognized and devoutly acknowledged in your progress through the militant, to the heavenly state. He alone is "the shield of your help and the sword of your excellency." And O! let us individually anticipate the period when, safely restored to the heavenly fold, we shall enter upon and enjoy the festivities of our Father's love. Now, indeed, is our time to mourn; but our sorrow shall be turned into joy. Our restoration to God in the kingdom of His glory, will be the occasion of joyous sympathies and assemblages in heaven. Those blessed angels, who now rejoice in our recovery, will, on the consummation of our bliss, swell before the Redeemer their anthems of praise. Their songs will be more numerous than the tears we have shed; while expressions of eternal gratitude will become at once our engagement and our delight.

SERMON XXXVIII.

THE DARK MOUNTAINS.

"Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains."—Jeremiah xiii. 16.

THE calls to repentance and confession of sin which enliven the Sacred Word are numerous, and presented to our minds under every variety of form. Sometimes these calls are conveyed in language simple and unadorned; again they are wrapt in figurative expressions

intelligible to all, yet contrived to strike the imagination with effect. Under every form they are impressive, and, as coming from one whose wisdom penetrates where our own eyes cannot, are justly entitled to our serious attention and regard. Among the reasons assigned in Scripture for the frequency and urgency of these calls, is "the deceitfulness of sin," and consequent danger to which we are continually exposed. The reasonable presumption of Scripture is, not that the people of God will always be found undeviatingly true to the narrow path which leadeth unto life, however desirable and worthy of our humble and continued endeavor this may be; but that God's people will cherish, at least, a lively sensibility to the calls of God, and speedily return when found in deviation from the narrow path, either on the right hand or on the left. This sensibility to the Divine calls, and peculiar susceptibility of repentance, ever distinguish the wise virgins from the evil generation with which they are surrounded. Thus the Apostle: "Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.)*" To the same import is the exhortation in our text: "Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains." In both passages the same prominent ideas are presented to our minds:

1. The Deceitfulness of Sin.

2. The consequent Danger to which we are exposed.

3. The wisdom of a seasonable Repentance.

First, the Deceitfulness of Sin.—By the deceitfulness of sin, we here mean the address with which sin en-

* Heb. iii. 13.

gages the heart. When men meditate some selfish or unworthy end, they begin at a distance from their object and approach obliquely. Thus, by various arts, they often win their way and evade suspicion. This address sin possesses in an eminent degree. We need only advert to the garden of Eden to find a signal illustration. In this way the people of God, in all ages, have been approached and won upon, until presently, if not rescued, the integrity of the heart gives way and their goings slide. Thus the Prophet Hosea says: "O Israel, return thou unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity."* To become the victims of iniquity, therefore, it is not required that we should fall into actual transgression, but that our hearts should slide from their integrity. This is the iniquity which precedes our fall, and though the actual fall be intercepted, still we have need to repent of our heart apostacy, and to return unto the Lord our God. Thus the Spirit unto the angel of the Church of Ephesus: "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent."† Were we to look abroad into the world, it is possible we might discover individuals who, with desperate feelings, impetuously pursue their career of ruin; unhappy beings, in whom sin worketh effectually. They are not merely drawn downwards by the allurements of sin, but down-trodden by the tyranny of sin. Such persons are beyond the ordinary motives to repentance, and, if saved at all (for with God nothing is impossible), they will require an extraordinary interposition in their behalf. But how did these men arrive at this desperate state in their

* Hosea xiv. 1.

† Rev. ii. 4.

spiritual affairs? Doubtless it was not the work of a moment, but rather one of gradual declension. The integrity of the heart yielded to the solicitations of sin; the call to repentance was unheeded. Presently their goings began to slide; the call to repentance was now disregarded. Finally, the unhappy victim was overreached, and is now rudely impelled downward without any arts of decoy. "Give glory to the Lord your God before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains." Experience, even among the heathen, combines with scripture to testify that no man suddenly falls to the lowest depths of vice. "There are certain rudiments of vice," says the Roman satirist, "in which men are first initiated, and then they proceed by degrees to greater and fouler crimes." The Scriptures, indeed, fix the rudiments of vice—where the sagacity of the Roman poet did not reach—in the corruption of our fallen nature. Here, under various appeals or exciting causes, which we term *temptations*, the power of sin is felt; and unless the law of God is in our heart, and the heart itself fortified by Divine grace, its affections will yield under this power, and soon our goings will slide. Steps heedlessly directed into devious paths may indeed, upon conviction, be retraced—never with more ease than at the moment; but if under light and motive presented to the mind, this retracing of steps be not seasonably effected, the judgment will begin to fail, and the heart to sink under the shadows of the dark mountains.

In every stage, however, of declension, sin is deceitful; its schemes are visionary; its promises are deceptive; its hopes, though they flatter for a season, *must* perish: all that will be *here* found substantial and enduring, will be the final degradation and misery into which it conducts the soul.

But let us notice more particularly the stages of sin and the marks by which they may be known. The rudiments of sin, we said, are fixed in our fallen nature: "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh." The original intention of our Maker has been defeated; corruption dwells within us, and the world around is but a spur to its activity. Now, it is this indwelling corruption which creates excuses for sin, and hence we need no stronger confirmation to the fact of our apostacy, than that furnished in a prevailing disposition to extenuate our faults. Times of *ignorance* God winks at, and by confession of sin God upholds our integrity. But this prevailing spirit to extenuate what we perceive and know to be amiss in us, indicates a marked stage of degeneracy. Young persons, especially, should never indulge this spirit. Better, far better, to suffer wrongfully, and to take this suffering patiently, than thus to hazard the integrity of the heart. Let us remember that when uprightness and integrity are spoken of in Scripture, they do not imply undeviating rectitude, for in this sense there is none upright; but they imply humble confession of sin: "Better is the poor," says Solomon, "that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool."* It was the crime alleged by our Lord against the Pharisees, that, though guilty in the sight of God, they justified themselves before men.

The holy men of old, when betrayed into sin, vindicated God by an humble confession of their sins, and took to themselves the shame and confusion of face which belong to the transgressor. Thus their uprightness was preserved and their sanctification promoted.

* Prov. xix. 1.

But if, under the conviction afforded, we palliate our sins; if we esteem reputation with men more than integrity with God, then we must not be surprised, if we soon begin to defend and maintain, what at first we sought only to palliate or conceal. This is one reason which may be assigned in accounting for the high tone which sin has assumed, and its predominant influence in the world. The hearts of men are darkened under the habitual hypocrisy they indulge; and when their hopes as hypocrites perish, then they begin to defend what they can no longer veil from sight. But if the downward course be not here arrested, by seasonable repentance, what wonder if our zeal in the service of sin should become as intemperate as it is misplaced, and our affections in this service as violent as they are unholy. Our Lord affirmed of some in this situation, that "they compassed sea and land to make a proselyte."* Indeed it would be difficult to account for the zealous activity evinced by some in the service of sin, but upon the supposition that their affections have become deeply interested in this engagement. The strangest anomalies are here sometimes exhibited. Men penurious on all other points, yet in the service of sin are transformed into prodigals. Here only are their hearts unlocked and their hands open. But if we repent not under the calls of God (as indeed thousands have done to the saving of the soul), then must we inevitably pass into that lower ground noticed by the Apostle, when he affirms that they themselves not only do such things, "but have pleasure in them that do them."† The gradation in sin is here well defined. For experience proves that in a less advanced state of

* Matt. xxiii. 15.

† Rom. i. 32.

recession from God, we may utterly abominate in others those practices, to which nevertheless we ourselves are addicted. The enormity in our own case is veiled by self-love ; but in the case of others it has no such advocacy. We see the wickedness as it is, and abominate the impiety. This detestation of sin supposes some remains within us of moral rectitude. But when we have "pleasure in them that do these things"—that is, rejoice in their iniquity as giving countenance and support to our own impiety—make a covenant with them, and aim with them to outbrave the public sentiment and feeling, then have we sunk a lower deep in moral degeneracy. Where men of this class confederate, as they naturally will do, it is difficult to conceive on what ground their return to God is to be expected. The exchange between them is equal. Equal countenance and support are given and received ; and as they hate reproof and despise instruction, what remains but that they seat themselves together in the scorner's chair ? So hardening in sin indeed are these confederacies, that whatever out of them a man may be, the Scriptures esteem him blessed who has been preserved from them. We know of but one gradation more beyond this, manifested under the form of a direct agency assumed on behalf of the Adversary (as in the instance of Ahab), where labors are put forth on set purpose for the inculcation of his doctrines, and the enlargement of his kingdom upon the ruins of God's truth and plans of mercy. "But there was none like unto Ahab," we read, "which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord."* Such, then, from intimations given us in Scripture, we conceive to be the gradations

* 1 Kings, xxi. 25.

in the progress of sin. So deceitful is sin, and so imperceptibly is its victim borne along, that rarely is the mind prepared at a time for more than a single step. This taken, half the difficulty with respect to another is overcome. And thus have men, partly by the allurements of sin and partly by its underfoot and down-treadings, been pushed on in their melancholy course, until their distant remove from the Father of their spirits has taken form in an agency and factorship for the devil. Often, indeed, they are not permitted to attain this bad eminence. As the feet of the mountain traveller have sometimes tripped at the midway ascent, and himself been precipitated into ruin, so it is no unusual occurrence that men in the midway road of sin should fall to rise no more forever. What stage in iniquity, indeed, has not furnished to the grave its victim; and to what one will not the admonition in our text apply? "Give glory to the Lord your God, before He cause darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains."

We proceed to consider briefly the peculiar danger to which we are exposed from the deceitfulness of sin. Had we to contend only with an open and avowed enemy, our conflicts might be more violent indeed, but our danger would be less. Where force had been repelled, stratagem has often succeeded. Such are our dangers. We have an insidious enemy, skilled in address, who approaches but to ensnare, and ensnares but to destroy. But the great danger to be apprehended, and that which merits our unceasing vigilance, is that suggested in the text, *the darkening of the heart*. This is the great danger, we say, to which we are exposed by indulgence in sin, and it involves every other. It is affirmed by the Apostle of some, that their foolish

hearts were darkened; and this affirmation will measurably apply to every grade of our recession from God. Every deliberate act of sin draws a veil, more or less opaque, over the heart. Unbelief is thereby cherished. Aversion to God and distastefulness to the restraints of religion are thereby created. It is often humiliating to the Christian to look back, and to see from what a dire state of blindness and insensibility he has been awakened, and from what impending evils he has been delivered. What is thus, perhaps, every Christian's occasional state, is in reality the habitual state, we fear, of many among us. Their hearts are thickly darkened, while they themselves are daily exposed to imminent hazards. Your pathway, my slumbering friends, is one of recession from God; and you yourselves are borne along so insensibly, and with so little toil, that you are not aware either of the extent of your apostacy, or of the difficulties which await your return. In the mean time, the day is far spent; the night is at hand; the broken ledges thicken around you; deep fissures multiply as you advance; and crumbling precipices are on the right hand and on the left. "Give glory to the Lord your God, before He cause darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains."

From what has been said, but little space will be required to enforce the wisdom of a speedy repentance. This section of our discourse addresses itself to all, but especially to you, my young friends. Insidious, indeed, may have been the address of your Enemy, fascinating the allurements which he has spread before you, and dangerous the bias which your heart may already have received; but the obstacles to your return are neither numerous nor severe. Now, then, be assured, is your

time. What your hands find to do, now is the time for its performance. Guard, then, we beseech you, against a spirit of self-justification under the wrong bias you may have received. Seek no ground of extenuation. Spread no delusive covering on that apostasy which has turned away your hearts from God. "He that covereth his sins," says Solomon, "shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy."* To the same import is the injunction in our text, "Give glory to the Lord your God." But if you vindicate not the Lord your God, nor your own integrity, by a speedy repentance; if you conceal iniquity until it can no longer be concealed, your heart will darken—you will defend and maintain what should have been confessed and forsaken. And O! remember the imagery in our text. See the mountain traveller—benighted—bewildered—lost—stumbling over broken ledges, and plunging into irrecoverable ruin! Remember this spectacle which so forcibly strikes the imagination, and let it be to you a motive to retrace seasonably every wandering step, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. But, blessed be God, there is no fall in sin and misery this side the fatal stumble, which the Scriptures have not depicted, and from which the traveller, weary and heavy-laden, has not been upraised and conducted home. And shall one among ourselves delay this return for a moment? Will you delay this return, beloved friends, who have long trodden, and trodden far and wide the dark mountain? Is it nothing, that our own observation has confirmed what the Scriptures have taught; that we have seen

* Prov. xxviii. 13.

the unwary ensnared, drawn away, and finally down-trodden, while misery and destruction have thickened in his path? Is it nothing, that much which the Scriptures have recorded, has been realized in our own unhappy experience? Shall we still disregard the word of wisdom? Is it so, that destruction must come as a whirlwind, and we, in eternity, be overwhelmed with that conviction which we now so obstinately resist? God forbid! Let us rather repent, every one of us. Let us rather "give glory to the Lord our God (by confession of sin), before He cause darkness, and before our feet stumble on the dark mountains."



SERMON XXXIX.

THE DEAF EAR IN PROSPERITY.

"I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst I will not hear."—
Jer. xxii. 21.

THE text records the remonstrance of Almighty God addressed to Jehoiakim, king of Judah. This monarch was tributary to Pharaoh-Necho, king of Egypt, and was noted for his oppressive administration of the government. In the midst of his self-confident and vain-glorious career, he was sharply rebuked by the Prophet Jeremiah, and premonished of the righteous visitations of Heaven which awaited his impiety. Against these seasonable and well-directed admonitions, however, Jehoiakim had closed his heart. Alas! that heart was intoxicated with the day-dreams of worldly splendor and ambition: it had become the business of his life to

stifle his best convictions, and to quench the spark which parental piety and assiduity had nurtured within his breast. Our text, we say, records the affecting remonstrance of Almighty God with this infatuated monarch, at a period when adversity had stepped in to moderate the fervor of his ambition, and to teach him experimentally the precarious tenure of all earthly good: "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst I will not hear."

Now, had the fault implied in this self-confident state of mind been in any way peculiar to Jehoiakim, we might have been spared, this morning, the consideration of its danger. But is it so? Was *his* alone the proneness to become elated with prosperity? to turn a deaf ear and a regardless heart to the voice of his Redeemer? Was *his* alone the folly—the madness which puts off attention to the Divine monitions until its victim is reduced to those dire extremities, when, in reality, he can be no longer profited by them? We fear not: so far from any peculiarity in the case of Jehoiakim, we fear the fault implied is but the too common dereliction of mankind, and in but too many instances may have found its illustration even among ourselves. We purpose, then, to consider,—

First,—What we may here understand by prosperity, in connection with its ordinary proneness to disregard the Divine monitions.

Secondly,—To improve the subject to our own edification.

In the marginal reading, what, in the text is rendered "prosperity," assumes the plural form "prosperities." This form covers all the various aspects of prosperity, such as youth, health, successful industry, the comforts and conveniences of life. Few, indeed, are

the individuals who have not participated more or less in these prosperities. Under what auspicious circumstances may not the seed-time of life have opened upon us; what a large portion, too, of health may we not have enjoyed; how successfully, at one period or other, may we not have prosecuted our business engagements; how bountifully may not our cup have been supplied with the comforts and conveniences of life. Look, too, at the kind and considerate friends with whom, at one period or other, we may have been surrounded; who, in feeling and affection, were identified with our happiness and welfare; who sympathized in all our griefs and enjoyments; who sustained our hearts, strengthened our hands, and gilded our pathway onward into life with a radiance not its own.

We may perceive, then, from the plural form of the marginal reading, as well as from the nature of this case, that the term prosperity, as here applied, can be restricted to no one particular aspect or form of earthly beatitude, but embraces all those ingredients whatever, which mingle in the cup of human life and sweeten its bitter waters.

Now, we learn from our text what, without such inspiration, we might not so readily have apprehended, that, as a father indicates his paternal affection, not so much by empty protestations, as by forms far more substantial and expressive; so the parental voice of God is identified with every form and aspect of prosperity that our earthly circumstance admits of. "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity." The voice of thy God—his benign appeal to thine heart—mingled and blended itself with the genial current of thy youthful blood; it bloomed in thy health; it whispered in the success which crowned thy handiworks; it shone re-

splendently in the abounding blessings, which irradiated with gladness every expressive power and faculty of thy mysterious frame. O! how touching is this remonstrance of Almighty God: "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; I spake unto thee as an affectionate parent addresses the children in whom he is well pleased, filling their mouths with good things and crowning their existence with joy and gladness."

It is evident, however, that the words admit of another construction yet in perfect agreement with the one we have taken. The voice of our Heavenly Father is not only heard in our prosperities, but when we were in the possession and enjoyment of these prosperities, God spake unto us by his ministers, enlightening our understanding with celestial rays, and enriching our hearts with benign sentiments and aspirations. It was so with Jehoiakim. In the flush of his prosperity, he was faithfully admonished by the prophet,—and it has been so with ourselves. At what period of our accountable existence have we not been addressed of God in this form? What imperishable truths have not been unfolded to our youthful hearts? How has not our natural ignorance been dispelled, our errors been corrected, our good conversation been encouraged, our faults been reprov'd? Line upon line, precept upon precept—here a little and there a little—so that it may with reason be inquired—What more can be said unto us than has not been said? or done unto us which has not been done? We now need to be reminded rather than to be instructed; to be stirred up to the improvement of what we have received, than to be cumbered with further accessions of knowledge. "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity." But the voice of God to Jehoiakim was not only identified with his

prosperity, and conveyed to him in the seasonable admonitions of the Prophet, but it reached his ear also in the adverse providences which befell others in like circumstances with himself. No truth is of more importance to be understood and allowed its weight, than that many adverse providences are permitted to befall others, for our own timely admonition. As the Apostle expresses it, "these things happened unto them for our ensamples."* And O! by what adverse providences in the case of others have not we ourselves been addressed. Are we now in the prosperity of youth? Where then, my young friend, may we not ask, are some of those with whom you were early associated in the occupations or pleasures of life? Alas! we call, but they answer not; they are cut down, dried up, and withered. Theirs were the hopes—the opening prospects—the bright anticipations which enrapture vision, and expand your breasts; but their probation is closed—their destiny is decided forever. What think you? Were you better than they? Are we in the prosperity of health? Alas! how impressively have we not been addressed of God in the shattered constitution of the strong man, which by fell disease has been spared awhile only to linger on the margin of the grave! Are we in the prosperity of successful industry? Look around and about us—mark what solemn lessons of the uncertainty and instability of all earthly good, have not been inculcated on our understandings and on our hearts? Were these prospects once less flattering than our own now are? Were they attended with a temper of mind less secure or confident than that which may now exhilarate our own bosoms? Yet how have not the

* 1 Cor. x. 11.

mighty fallen? How has not adversity triumphed? How has not this blind and presuming confidence been made to cower, and to realize its own nothingness, and to acknowledge that the wisdom of the wise is foolishness with God; that man is a vain shadow, and his prosperity a vapor, that appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away. Are we in the enjoyment of that species of prosperity which anoints its pathway with oil—which swells every stream of comfort, and makes the heart to glow in the overflowing plenitude of its own satisfaction? Look around us again, and hear the word of the Lord in the loss of friends—in the painful bereavement of many a blessing which had intergrown with the fibres of the heart. What think you? Were we better than they? “I spake unto thee in thy prosperity.” I embodied my voice in thy youth—in thy health—in the success of thy handiworks—in every comfort which could season the heart, and in every friendship which could gladden its affections. I spake to thee by my messengers—by the records of truth. I spake unto thee by the misfortunes which, for thy sake, befell others, “but thou saidst, I will not hear.”

There is yet a third medium through which our Heavenly Parent ordinarily conveys His voice to the human mind; we mean the secret monitions of His Spirit. We by no means hold as true the irresistible agency of that Blessed Spirit in the work of salvation. No; Scripture and experience show, that a man may turn away his ears and close his heart even against the direct action of the Spirit. But he is made to feel at the same time, there is some mysterious reproof administered to his profligacy and licentiousness. In the day of final account it will doubtless appear, that as thou-

sands of the people of God, in the absence of all other comforts, have been sustained and cheered in their heavenward course by the agency of the Holy Spirit; and as thousands of others who had resisted the more obvious and tangible means of reclamation, were, nevertheless, subdued and brought home to God by the reproofs directly ministered by the same Spirit; so there will be a frightful number, who to all other aggravations of their guilt and folly have added this—they have grieved the Spirit of God in His personal administration over their own spirits; they have impiously hardened their hearts in resistance to His action; they have closed every avenue to their sensibilities, as though in insult of God's authority and in defiance of His power. "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts."* "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear." The subject as now unfolded before us, suggests some considerations of great practical moment. In the first place, we may see the obvious tendency of prosperity in its application to beings like ourselves and in a world like this. It becomes an occasion to the flesh. At best, and under the most favorable circumstances, the flesh lusteth against the spirit; but it is in our prosperities, it is in these peculiar seasons of self-confidence and presumption, that the flesh derives its strongest incentives to rebellion. "Before I was afflicted," says David, "I went astray."† So also the Prophet Jeremiah—"Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees. He hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity; therefore (adds the Prophet) his taste remained in

* Heb. iii. 15.

† Ps. cxix. 15.

him, and his scent is not changed.”* His unbroken prosperity, it appears, made him thoughtless and supine, and inclined him to persist in his old abominations, without one serious thought on the evil of his ways, or real purpose of amendment. Likewise, the text affirms it was in the prosperity of Jehoiakim that the Word of God was impiously repelled from his ear and from his heart. Now we do not say that this perversion of prosperity, to purposes of self-elation and neglect of the soul, is a necessary and unavoidable attendant on its enjoyment; but this much we do say, that in our prosperities, whether under the aspect of youth, health, successful business or an abounding crop, we need take heed lest our hearts be deceived, lest we hear not the voice of God nor regard His gracious purposes. Tell me, my young friend, are the generous susceptibilities of thy youth improved or perverted? Have they bound thy heart indissolubly to thy Saviour? or have they proved but an occasion of worldliness and dissipation—of spiritual insensibility, profligacy and ruin. How startling to many a youth has been that recorded admonition, “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment!”† “I spake unto thee in thy prosperity, but thou saidst, I will not hear.” What, moreover, was our course of life when prosperity, in the form of uninterrupted health, crowned our days with vigor and our hearts with joy? Did we receive with meekness, or reject with effrontery this parental appeal of Almighty God?

* Jer. xlvi. 11.

† Eccl. xi. 9.

Look where we will, and at our prosperities under every diversified aspect, and we shall doubtless perceive an alarming want of consideration in respect of the voice of God in them, and of the Divine intention and purpose in the blessing bestowed. "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity, but thou saidst, I will not hear."

Another legitimate deduction from our subject would seem to be, that if prosperity in its application to our present state is marked with such dangerous liabilities to the soul, then the due consideration of this ought greatly to qualify our estimation of its value. If under its influence we naturally slide into a presumptuous and self-confident state of mind, which can never be reconciled with our interests beyond the grave, then, to say the least, we need not covet prosperity; we need not be impetuous in our pursuit of these things—certainly we need not grieve ourselves at him whose way doth prosper. Where is our warrant that in the coveted thing we shall differ from others, either in forgetting God altogether, or in contenting our souls with meagre or mistaken notions of a holy life? Look at Jehoiakim. O how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God! What obstacles in that way do they not create? what unsanctified engrossment of thought, purpose, and action—what corroding anxieties—what distracting doubts? In the mean time, all that is spiritual in our nature is impoverished. The best affections of the heart wither; the brightest glories of eternity are eclipsed in the vain pageantry of a world that is seen. Now, if God send prosperity upon us, why we must receive it as a blessing, and endeavor to improve it accordingly to virtuous purposes; but what care, what unceasing vigilance, what humble and filial dependence

are not indispensably required, lest we pervert into a curse what was intended for a blessing! This is always the case when, under the exhilaration of prosperity, we close our hearts and become less willing to listen to the voice of conscience and truth. "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity, but thou saidst, I will not hear."

A third obvious inference from our subject is, that adverse changes in life are not as unfriendly as on first sight they would appear to be. It is significantly affirmed of a great multitude that were seen in Heaven, that they had come out of great tribulation. They were probably men who in prosperity had polluted their own souls, but who, through the redeeming influence of adverse changes and under the Holy Spirit, had been brought to wash their robes and to make them white in the blood of the Lamb. Certain it is that the day of adversity is ordinarily a day of consideration. What more evident mark of the Divine favor can we require than that God condescends to change our state, circumstance, or condition in life; to empty us from vessel to vessel as we settle upon our lees; to rescue us from a state of vain confidence, where our souls were exposed to imminent hazards, and to choose for us a state, the natural tendency of which is to awaken within us the spirit of humble and filial dependence on Himself? "O yes," says one, "it is good for me that I have been in trouble." "O yes," says another, "the house of mourning is better to me than the house of feasting." "The Lord gave," says Job, "and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord."* Be assured it is no hard requisition

* Job i. 21.

upon us to receive with both hands, earnestly and gratefully, every reverse in life, however painful to the flesh; acknowledging in it God's special favor towards us, and appreciating it as a pledge of His parental concern for our salvation.

As a last inference from our subject, let us take heed how we disregard or lightly esteem our adversities in life. They are God's last resort in our behalf. He spake to us in our prosperity, but we were self-willed; He has now graciously chosen for us a new and more favorable position. Be assured, my suffering friends, the day of adversity is a day for serious consideration. The prosperity of the wicked shall destroy them; but in their case there is hope. God may seasonably lay his afflictive hand upon them, bring down their high thoughts, soften their obdurate hearts, and open their whole souls in acknowledgment of his grace and mercy. But woe to that man whose adverse change in life has produced no change in the temper and disposition of his mind. Woe to that man who, like Moab, is emptied from vessel to vessel indeed, but whose taste remaineth in him, and whose scent is not changed. Woe to that man that striveth with his Maker. How unworthy is this spirit and behavior in itself! how ungrateful and irreverent! God spake to us in our prosperity, but we were worldly-minded and covetous, refusing to hear; and now He speaks to us in our adversity, but we have not resorted to Him for help. We are choosing to ourselves Egyptian allies, like Israel of old, and our destinies are recorded in the utter confusion, overthrow, and ruin of that misguided people. O for grace and power from above to save our souls—to disperse the deceitful glare which dazzles our hearts and obscures from our vision our real state!

May God, in infinite mercy, lighten our eyes, that we sleep not in death; open our ears and unlock our hearts, that we may hear and receive that voice which hitherto in vain has called so loud and long! "Hear instruction and be wise, and refuse it not."*

SERMON XL.

REMORSE IN HADES.

"Then he said, I pray thee, therefore, Father, that thou wouldst send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment."—St. Luke xvi. 27, 28.

WE are all familiar with that most affecting narrative of which our text is a part. It was recited by our Lord, and, for any thing that appears to the contrary, may be real history—a well-authenticated account of certain individuals who had lived in Judea, and had recently died, and now occupied their respective places among departed spirits, awaiting the judgment of the great day. With one of the parties—a man named Lazarus—we are not at present concerned. In respect of him, it may serve our present purpose to remark, that adversity had marked him for her own child by adoption, and had pursued him unrelentingly at every turn of life, until in the grave his body, and in Abraham's bosom his spirit, had found a refuge from all their woes. Neither are we at present concerned with all that is affirmed of the rich man, within the sphere of

* Prov. viii. 35.

his earthly term. That he abused his station in life, is certain; that, in the forgetfulness of God, he portioned his soul with earthly good, our Lord is careful to inform us. And as, in the case of Lazarus, Death had closed the door on all his troubles, and kindly received him into enduring rest; so with this man, Death had barred the admission of all those objects of sensuality, worldliness and ambition, which had reigned supreme within his heart, while it introduced his spirit to a region of unutterable tribulation and anguish. Neither are we at present concerned with that crisis in his misery in which his humblest petitions were repulsed, and *that* in such wise as extinguished for ever all hope of any alleviation of his doom. All these points in the narrative are, indeed, instructive and admonitory, but they are not those to which, at present, we shall call attention.

Our text reveals another point, and what, of all others, we deem most solemn, and transcendently worthy of our notice,—we mean the remorse intensely felt by a lost spirit at having corrupted and endangered, by a bad example, those who, in the present life, were within the more immediate sphere of his affection. It would seem that the miserable being who speaks in our text was the first-born of a numerous family of children: the parents were dead; and as, in virtue of his primogeniture, he had inherited the family domain, so the care of his rising brethren had devolved upon him. To this trust he had proved wholly recreant. Moses and the Prophets were disregarded, while the paternal mansion had become a scene of dissipation and excess. In his mode of life, in his equipage and personal attire, he, though a son of Abraham, emulated the Roman princes, vainly endeavoring, by sumptuous

entertainments and ostentatious display, to secure that homage from his fellow-men which is rightly due only to intellectual and moral worth. Under the silent but sure influence of this bad example, his five younger brethren were forming up to manhood; their estrangement from the God of their fathers kept pace with their growth in years; all within them was vain and worldly; God was not in all their thoughts. The pre-eminence of their brother in age and dignity, which, in the Providential economy, was designed to exert a mild but persuasive influence on their course in life, had served in its perversion but to ensnare and mislead their feet. They followed their elder brother and walked after him, not in Moses and the Prophets—not in that narrow way which leadeth unto life—but in that broad frequented way which leadeth downwards to the chambers of death.

Such was the state of things in this family, when the elder brother was called away from the earth: he was buried, and his deluded spirit passed into its own place of torment, by the just appointment of God. On opening his eyes in his dreary chamber, all his powers of thought and of sensation were concentrated in his own immediate sufferings; but vain and presumptuous deceits still lingered within his breast. He had expected, in some way or other, that the declared end of the wicked would not, in his case, be realized; that this would either be escaped altogether, or meet with such alleviations as would justify the present gratifications of his libertine course. But he was here undeceived—alas, too late to be profited by the discovery. So far from any mitigation of existing misery, there presently arose within his breast a deep-wrought presentiment of the remorse which would break in and prey

upon his immortality, when his five brethren, so misguided by his own influence and example, would also be reduced to those awful extremities which then engulfed his own soul. How would he be able to meet them—spirit to spirit—in these dolorous abodes? How would he endure the thought of having been, in any form, instrumental to this their final ruin? In addition to his own miseries, how would not his soul writhe under all *their* agonies, and painfully echo back all their bitter wailings and gnashings of teeth?

It was under these torturing presentiments of worse things to come, that, as a last effort of expiring hope, he made the unavailing petition recorded in our text—“I pray thee, therefore, Father, that thou wouldst send him to my father’s house, for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.” As though he had said—My own circumstances I perceive are irremediable in their nature, but spare me the deeper miseries of remorse of meeting in this place those objects of my affection whom my example has served only to lead astray. There is no passage in Scripture record—no thought of which the human mind is susceptible—more affecting than this,—none which now appeals more persuasively to the heart of man to arise seasonably from sleep—to awake seasonably from death. It suggests many considerations of moment, to some of which our present attention may be profitably directed.

We here learn, what in no other form could have been so effectually taught,—how a lost spirit estimates that course of life which once he had so impetuously pursued. A supreme devotedness to the occupations and pleasures of the world had brought this man to interminable ruin, and he now plainly saw that it would

bring others also who were treading in the path which he himself had trod. Let our impressions, then, of these things be taken from a competent witness. If we regard not the warning voices of Moses and the Prophets—of Jesus Christ and his Apostles—let us at least be admonished by one who had rashly hazarded the experiment, and now reports the awful result.

The wages of sin is death; but in no form is sin more dangerous—because in none more insidious—than in that which engrosses the heart with the pursuits of worldly pleasure or ambition. No charges heavier than these are preferred against this man: nothing appears to the contrary, but that he was a man whose character the world might respect, and, in many points, all might esteem. His was the case of a man stupefied with the intoxication of sensual pleasure, and deaf to every monition of Scripture levelled against his course. His was the case of worldly-mindedness within the Church, and of subsequent neglect of the soul; a case of intenseness upon worldly pleasures and distinctions, with its deadening influence on the religious affections; a case which illustrates, not so much any particular vice as the foundation of all vices, and is, therefore, singularly offensive to God, and destructive of a man's own soul. Many circumstances may operate to prevent in such a man the development of any particular vice, but in reality he is at the mercy of all vices which may happen to assail him. He is exposed to every blast of temptation, and if the interests of religion and virtue are not avowedly sacrificed, it is because the man has continued to reconcile them with his intemperate pursuit of the world.

But let us be warned by that voice which issues from beyond the grave, that this temper of mind—

however we may gloss its character—slides its victim off at last into the chamber of eternal death. We may awake from this slumber in youth, and secure to the life before us all the advantages of the discovery; or we may awake in the autumn of our existence, only to deplore the folly of a life misspent; but it is fairly within our liabilities not to be disturbed at all till, as in the man before us, the awful reality of God's righteous malediction has dispersed our illusion for ever. O! let us seriously, and devoutly, and perseveringly aim to be renewed in the spirit and disposition of our mind. Let us secure to our God the supremacy in every affection; that whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we may realize as upon us the restraining yoke of our Divine Master.

Another matter suggested by our text is a consideration of the influence which we respectively exercise on the community at large, and especially on those whom Providence has placed under our immediate supervision and control. It has pleased our Maker in the formation of the human mind, while he has armed it with an instinctive repulsion of all arbitrary power, to clothe it with a mysterious susceptibility of influence from persons and things without us; and as this endowment is the parent of much good, so it is liable to lay us open to many serious evils. It would be impossible to say how effective is that influence which men reciprocally exert. But as a bad example falls in with our own remaining depravity, while a good one is met by more or less opposition from the same source, so it can be no cause for wonder if the preponderance should strongly incline to that which is bad. As a general rule, it is the warm affection of the heart which gives to extraneous influence its effectiveness. We cleave to

those whom we love, and, without a miracle of mercy, we shall transfer all their errors, if not their viciousness, into our own character.

We have more than one intimation given us in our narrative, that the miserable man before us was not deficient in any principle of natural benevolence. Lazarus was a daily petitioner at his gate, which is a good sign. His younger brethren had doubtless returned all his fraternal regards with the liveliest affection; and it was this consideration which doubtless gave rise to the most agonizing reflections. Their very affection for him had proved a snare, and opened their youthful minds more effectually to his debauching influence. They were now but striding in his own footsteps onwards and downwards, and bid fair in the issue to inflame his own miseries with the keenest inflictions of reproach. Fain would he now have checked that progress which his own bad example first set in motion towards utter ruin; but it was too late. He had given an impulse to their course which by no means could he arrest; and in reply to his most urgent entreaty for an extraordinary messenger, he is given in substance to understand that no petition of a spirit under his doom could be received. Besides, his brethren had every needful provision of warning in the family Bible, and in the sanctuary also, where every Sabbath day that Bible was read and expounded. We may here learn that it is in what God has been pleased to afford, and not in what unreasonable men require, that we find the righteous rule and limitation in what concerns our duty.

How then do we individually stand in respect of our example? We do not inquire into *the success* of its influence; for whether this latter be good or bad,

its effect on those around us may vary, and often does, from its natural tendency and from all which might have been reasonably expected; but we may well inquire into the character of the influence itself. Is it such as commends itself to the Gospel of Christ? or is it such as may implicate our own souls in the final destruction of the impenitent? Is it such as in that mild tendency which God has ordained, serves to draw those whom we love and who return our affection into a personal acquaintance with God, with a Redeemer, with His Church, with His blessed Spirit? Is it such as may serve to open the path before them, and determine their course heavenward; or is it such as by a process not less certain, serves to obliterate from their minds the very remembrance of these things, and to impart to the world around them a vehemence of attraction which they are in nowise able to resist? We say not now, how terrible is the thought of exposing our own souls to the terror of God's righteous indignation and wrath. We say not now how terrible is the thought of terminating our career in that dreary chamber where hope dies, and the soul shrivels amidst an all-pervading desolation. But in view of our text we now say, how terrible is the thought of encountering, in addition to our own personal miseries, the agonizing reflection of having been accessory in any form to the ruin of others! Answer to yourself, parent, how will you endure the reproaches of the children, to whose course your own example of irreligion and worldliness may have given an impulse, which has now shot utterly beyond your control? How will the licentious man meet that deluded victim whose weakness of mind and poverty, permitted of God, so far from eliciting his commiseration and defence, have created but too successful

ground on which her infamy has been projected and finally accomplished? What shall we say to such—to men whose station and influence have been employed to ensnare the weak, to despoil the poor, to rob the defenceless of her only recommendation to others and ground of self-respect? What think you? Is there no God to witness and to record these oppressions? Is there no righteous tribunal before which decisions shall be had?—is there no sentence of damnation to overwhelm the guilty with terror and dismay?—is there no remorse to fasten interminably on the conscience?—are there no reproaches to render even hell more hideous and its torments more insufferable to the soul? Be assured, lightly as these things may be now estimated, they can never be more lightly estimated than they once were by that heedless victim of sensuality and worldly-mindedness whose voice is echoed in our text. But sooner—with reverence be it spoken—shall God Himself cease to exist, than the period fail to come round when the illusion which may now cloud your understanding and distemper your heart shall be dispersed; when awful realities shall appear; when myriads of worlds like this, if possessed, would be freely exchanged for an extraordinary messenger to warn those whom you had enticed within the vortex of ruin, lest they also come into this place of torment. O let us be wise; let us understand this; let us consider our latter end.

This, then, is the leading point which our text suggests, and which we have endeavored to enforce—the danger involved in a bad influence, both in respect of our own souls and the souls of those around us. We may here perceive—for God forbid that we should ever experience—how personal miseries are inflamed

by tortures of remorse, in respect, especially, of objects of affection whom our influence has misled. Instances of this awful reality which our text reveals are witnessed even in the present life. Be the torment of hell in itself however great, it may be surpassed, after all, by the mysterious agonies of remorse in respect of others, the victims of our perverted influence and example. May God, in infinite mercy, awaken us to a more circumspect walk. O let us repent in season, and make our peace with God while pardon may be sought and mercy found! Let the time past of life suffice to have exercised an unprofitable, if not a pernicious influence around us; and let the residue of our days, under a new spirit and a holier determination, become a blessing to our own and to the souls of our families and friends. Then when our probation is ended we shall rise to the life immortal; and as in hell the reproaches of the destroyed infinitely augment the miseries of the destroyer, so in heaven its untold felicities will break forth into brighter glory as we greet the children, the brethren, the friends, the companions, whose feeble knees the benign influence of a good example had confirmed in the way of holiness—who followed us as we followed Christ, and now with us enjoy perpetual rest and felicity. That this may be our portion may God in mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON XLI.

THE ENDS OF A PREACHED GOSPEL.

(PREACHED AT AN ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD.)

“For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee; but the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee.”—Ezek. iii. 5, 6.

THE passage is a portion of an affecting charge received by the Prophet Ezekiel on being commissioned of Almighty God to preach repentance unto Israel, and the remission of sins. In this charge the Prophet is premonished by the Holy Ghost, that the people to whom he was now about to be sent were a rebellious, hard-hearted people; a people who had so long and so obdurately withstood their own best convictions, as in reality, under ordinary means, to have become morally incapable of repentance and conversion. Though, of all people, they were the most highly favored, yet, under the long-indulged perversion of their exalted privileges, they had become the most unrelenting in their impenitence. The Prophet was forewarned against the indulgence on his part of any flattering expectations of immediate success: such expectations would not be realized. Were it so, indeed, that he was now about to be sent on a foreign mission, to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language,—whatever previous difficulties must necessarily be encountered in executing his mission; or when these had been surmounted, and his message had been made intelligible to the people,—whatever obstacles to its reception

might then be opposed by the prejudices of education, or by the ruling superstition of that people; still, in other like cases, these numerous and diversified obstacles had been gradually yet effectually overcome. The men of Nineveh had repented at the preaching of Jonas. What inconceivable accumulation of prejudice and superstition has not crumbled and gradually disappeared under the mild radiance and renovating power of Divine truth!

“Surely, had I sent thee to them they would have hearkened unto thee.” But here was a separate and distinct case, illustrative of an important truth—that exalted privileges, when perverted, become the sorest obstacles to repentance. The people to whom Ezekiel was now to be sent were a chosen and peculiar nation;—the descendants of faithful Abraham; the depository of the sacred oracles. They were identical, moreover, in their language and idiom with the prophet; with early prejudices, too, all on the side of true religion; averse from superstition, and in nowise unfavorably affected by priests, rulers, or philosophers—and yet a people who, in their spiritual condition, and with relation to ordinary means of repentance, presented an aspect of utter hopelessness. The *strangeness* was not in *speech*, but in spirit; the hardness was not in language, but in heart. They are described in our chapter as an impudent, hard-hearted people,—that is, a people full of effrontery under their best convictions. As the prophet Isaiah expresses it—“The show of their countenance doth witness against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom.”* The prophet, though Divinely commissioned and sent among them, had *duty* only to

* Is. iii. 9.

perform, but nothing of success to anticipate. O what a hard service is here presented to our minds, my Reverend brethren; and, when not understood in all its bearings, how trying to the ministers of the Gospel! Under this service thousands of these ministers, in every age, have doubtless sunk into despondency. It is the toil of the husbandman without his expectation. It is the investment of the merchantman without his hopes. But despondence in a minister is rebellion against his God. Hence the charge to Ezekiel contains special admonition on this important point: "But thou, son of man"—a title indicating his many infirmities and his standing in need of Divine comfort and support—"hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious, like that rebellious house; open thy mouth and eat that I give thee,"—execute your mission with meekness and fidelity, and leave the issue with me; for thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel: surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee, but the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee.

The charge is impressive, and suggests for discourse three important ends to be served by preaching the Gospel. A consideration of these, with an application to the occasion before us, will at present claim our attention. Of these important ends, the first in order is, to open the eyes of sinners, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified. But when, by the pride of our impenitence, this primary intention of preaching is defeated, then the second important end to be served thereby is, to store the minds of men with

materials of conviction, and with motives to repentance and conversion, under the afflictive dispensations of Heaven. But where, through continued pride of impenitence, this second end is defeated also; then the third end to be served by preaching the Gospel is—to stop the mouths of those sinners against their own souls, under the final decision of their Judge.

The first end of preaching was early unfolded by the Prophets, speaking as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Thus the Prophet Isaiah—“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.”* And again—“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened.”† And again—“I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee for a light of the Gentiles,—to open the blind eyes; to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house.”‡ These passages, and many others, indicate the first end to be served by preaching the Gospel. Accordingly, when Saul was converted and sent to the Gentiles, this end is declared to be the object of his mission: first, to open the eyes of sinners. Spiritual blindness is the sad fruit of our apostacy from God, and, in itself, is a fruitful source of corruption. This by nature is our common allotment. We are men born blind, spiritually ignorant, and amidst all the light which nature can give, we labor under a cloud which nature cannot disperse. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, neither can

* Is. lxi. 1.

† Is. xxxv. 5.

‡ Is. xlii. 6, 7.

he know them.”* Spiritual realities are discerned by faith, and faith is a faculty which the natural man, as such, cannot have. Now the best gifts of nature, and their highest culture, cannot compensate the want of this faculty. In whatever beside the man may excel, he will be deficient in spiritual discernment; he will spend his money for naught, and his labor for *that* which satisfieth not; he will appreciate every thing but that which is indeed most valuable, and most inseparable from his true peace. We need not wonder at this. The thoughts of the natural man are not as God’s thoughts, neither, as a natural man, can his thoughts be otherwise; neither, as such, will he be taught of God. The inspiration of the Most High God addresses itself not to the wits of the natural man, but to the faith of the spiritual man; not to the ingenuity of the one, but to the meekness of the other. But if we possess not the faculties which are addressed, how shall we exercise their discriminating power? And if we exercise not their discriminating power, how shall we secure the benefits they were intended to convey? No; without faith we shall never discern spiritual things, and without meekness we shall never receive them with profit to our souls.

It may here be proper to remark, however, that we are subject to two kinds of blindness: one, the blindness of nature, which cannot see; the other, the blindness of corruption, which will not see. The first may be involuntary, and will flee before the effulgence of the Gospel. The second is voluntary, and may effectually resist all spiritual enlightenment. It is possible there may be blind men, even in our day, and

* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

among ourselves; but if so, let us be assured, beloved friends, *corruption*, not *ignorance*, characterizes our blindness. The Gospel brings with it to every man who hears its voice, certain illuminating energies. In this sense it may be truly affirmed that the Holy Ghost falls on all them that heard the word; the eyes of our understanding are opened; we have learned a lesson which we cannot unlearn. We may prove obstinate, indeed, and refractory; we may strive to be what we were in the times of our ignorance; we may cherish a deep-seated aversion to the light,—resist conviction, and at length practise successfully on our own credulity; we may be numbered among those of whom it is affirmed—“Their eyes have they closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and understand with their hearts, and be converted, and I should heal them.”*

But what does all this prove? Does it prove that we are yet involved in nature's gloom? that our times are yet the times of involuntary ignorance? Does it prove that faith cometh not to us by hearing? that the Holy Ghost has not fallen upon us? that it strives not with us? that it has not struck our minds with an evidence which our impenitence cannot bear? that it expostulates not with us? that it persuades not our understandings, our consciences?—or, rather, does it not prove that we hate the light? that we, in the effrontery of our spirits, resist the Holy Ghost? that we, in the foolishness of our own hearts, have joined in the conspiracy against our own souls? that we, in the impiety of our affections, have leagued with the god of this world, in blinding our own eyes, “lest the light of the glorious

* Mat. xiii. 15.

Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto us.”* O! it is a painful reflection that, even in our day, and among a people so highly favored as ourselves, individuals should be found who have closed the eye which God had opened, and turned from the glorious light which in mercy had risen upon them; who wish for none of its discoveries; who care not to be disturbed in their dangerous position; whose cry is, “A little sleep, a little slumber; a little folding of the hands to sleep.”† Such persons can enjoy no true peace; there is no peace to these men, saith my God. There is a worm at the root of all their pleasures; they live as children in the dark, under a perpetual apprehension of discovering some dread spiritual reality. Through every stage of their misguided existence they are pursued by awful misgivings, and at times with racking apprehensions, while under some strange perversion, they confound all the gracious provisions of a merciful God with the enemies of their peace. Their language is that of Ahab to Elijah—“Hast thou found me, O my enemy?”

We may have occasion to revert to this misguided class of persons, while considering another end to be served by preaching Christ. At present we are concerned with a wiser class, whose natural ignorance being dissipated under a preached Gospel, become Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile. These persons see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and, in dependence on God, aim to be converted by His Spirit, and to be healed. These, too, had their times of ignorance; but now they enjoy the times of illumination. Their language is—

* 2 Cor. iv. 4.

† Prov. vi. 10.

“Whereas I was once blind, now I see ; whereas I was once ignorant of myself, ignorant of my righteous God and of a judgment to come ; I now begin to realize some affecting discoveries on all these points. Whereas I was ignorant of God’s righteousness, and went about to establish my own righteousness ; I now see that my Redeemer only is the way, the truth, and the light, and that no man cometh unto the Father but by Him.” They begin now to discern the things of the Spirit, and having the faculty of faith in honest exercise, are, under the ordinary influences of the Spirit, suitably affected by Gospel truth.

It is worthy of remark, that whether we read the Acts of the Apostles or the subsequent history of the Church, or notice what has come under our own observation, a few, at least, wherever the Gospel has been preached, have been found to vindicate the saving intention of Divine mercy ; some Dionysius the Areopagite ; some woman named Demaris, and others with them. It is possible, indeed, that the instinctive propensity to close the eye which the Gospel had opened, is not so strongly perceived or felt by some as by others. Differences in this respect may originate in the formation of early habits, affecting simplicity, candor, or integrity of character ; but, whatever these differences be, no doubt can be entertained that the number of those who fall in with the first intention of the Gospel, would be greatly enlarged, would all but seriously reflect, that the first discoveries we make under the illuminations of the Spirit, must be more or less disquieting to our own minds. Alas ! what can a sinner expect to see with that eye which God has been pleased to open ? When Divine light sheds forth its rays, these irradiate the deep chambers of the soul, and serve but

to reprove us of sin, which we have loved; of a righteous God, whom we have opposed; and of a judgment to come, which we have contemned. An authoritative exhibition of these truths must necessarily be attended with emotions on our part, more or less painful in their nature. Felix trembled. Sinners have been awed by them in every age. Thousands have gone mourning all their days, and especially when that veil, which covers from our discernment the all-atoning blood of the Lamb, has, for the discipline of faith, been permitted to continue. Such persons see but in part. They have come to the mountain only which burned with fire; they are afraid of God's tokens; they are full of heaviness; they pour out their complaints before God, and show before Him their trouble. Now this, though a painful, is yet a profitable exercise of early faith. It is not without its peculiar promises—"Blessed are they that mourn," said our Lord, "for they shall be comforted."* Blessed is the man who, in an honest and good heart, receives from the Spirit the humiliating conviction of his sins; he shall be comforted. Though convinced of sin, he shall be convinced also of a Saviour from its guilt, and from its dominion; though convinced that God is just, he shall be convinced also that He is the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus; though convinced of a judgment to come, he shall be convinced also that there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.

But if because the first discoveries of faith are painful in their nature, as more or less they must necessarily be, we therefore close our eyes upon them—consider not our guilty state, neither a righteous God, neither a

* Mat. v. 4.

judgment to come, but rather blink these questions which the Gospel opens upon the heart; then we defeat in the outset the first intention of preaching, and become numbered with those who love darkness, hate the radiance of light, grieve the Spirit, harden their hearts, and if chosen at all of God will be chosen in the furnace of affliction. This will bring us to consider the second important end to be served by preaching the Gospel—we mean, to enrich the minds of sinners with materials of conviction, and with motives to repentance and conversion, under the afflictive dispensations of Heaven. This seems to have been the gracious intention indicated in the mission of the Prophet. Not that Israel was then prepared to receive with meekness the ingrafted Word which was able to save their souls. No; their eyes they had closed and their hearts they had hardened. But a day of providential visitation was fast approaching, and it was within the gracious purpose of Heaven, that their minds should be well stored with redeeming truth—truth, that is, which, though not allowed at present its proper influence on the heart and mind, yet under affliction might become lively and effective. But for this gracious economy the mission of Ezekiel would seem to us inexplicable, when it was foreseen, and the Prophet admonished, that no immediate success would attend it. This second end of preaching is illustrated in the provision made by Joseph in the granaries of Egypt, not so much for present use, as for an approaching season of famine. Every man has his seasons of deep-seated want and of distressing apprehensions; and well indeed if in this season of deep-felt impoverishment the mind be well furnished with religious truth, and we permitted to draw freely on these sacred stores. Thousands have

thus been chosen in the furnace who, under the first intention of preaching and under less imperious circumstances, had turned a deaf ear and a relentless heart to the most persuasive calls of their God. But then we should remember, that although it is possible that under the good Spirit of God the rod may re-open the eye which corruption had closed, and soften the heart which impenitence had hardened; yet to defeat the primary end of a preached Gospel, and to live on, tempting a reluctant Parent to afflict and grieve His children, is the veriest impiety, and attended often with fatal issue. In the first place, we have no security that in our individual case the rod will be ever employed. Thousands have died in their impenitence and without the Divine chastisement. They have come in no misfortune like other folk, neither have they been plagued like other men. Afflictions do not spring forth from the dust; they are under a wise control, and may be employed or not, as the sovereignty of Almighty God may determine. It was affirmed of Ephraim, under the corruption which had closed his eyes, "let him alone;"* and no man, in the indulgence of like impiety, can affirm in respect to himself a different determination on the part of Almighty God. He may be "let alone," come in no misfortune like other folk, until, like the rich man in the parable, he is precipitated from an elevation of unmingled prosperity into the depths of interminable woe. But though affliction be vouchsafed, where is the security that it will come seasonably? There are circumstances in which the fear of a sinner, under the calamities which have fallen upon him, is matter of derision to all the higher orders of

* Hos. iv. 17.

moral intelligences. They may laugh at our calamity, and mock when our fear cometh. We call upon God, but He will not answer; we seek Him early, but we shall not find Him—for that we hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. But suppose affliction come seasonably, where is the security that it will work in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness? It is not mere affliction, in any instance, which of itself, and independent of the Holy Spirit, worketh godly sorrow and converts the soul. No; affliction is but an instrumentality which may be blessed or not. There is a sorrow, indeed, which worketh death. It is the Holy Spirit only at any time which stirs up within us gracious affections. “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost;”* by which declaration we may understand that without this holy agency, and apart from its operation, neither the preaching of the Word, nor affliction, nor any other mere instrumentality will lead men unto repentance. Nothing is more common than to find men who can resist the scourge of Almighty God, as effectually as they can resist His Word. It is difficult to conceive by what process or through what medium, save that of some omnipotent act, these persons are to be snatched from the burning. We know, indeed, from the Sacred Word, that many will be turned into hell; that neither the first nor the second intention of a preached Gospel will avail them aught. They will despise the chastening of the Lord, as they despise His precepts. After their hardness and impenitent heart, they will treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.† This will lead us to con-

* 1 Cor. xii. 3.

† Rom. ii. 5.

sider the third end to be served by preaching the Gospel. This, as we have said, is to stop the mouths of sinners under the final decision of their Judge, which consigns them to irremediable ruin. It pertains to the honor of God, and to the vindication of His immaculate justice, that under the awards of the great day every mouth should be stopped—every sinner should be speechless. We know, indeed, that even now the human mind is susceptible of an awe-inspiring influence which effectually silences effrontery. Such like, pre-eminently, will be the conviction which is destined hereafter to fasten on the conscience of the impenitent sinner, and extinguish his bold shamelessness for ever. What the nature and extent of the sinner's emotion will then be, we have neither minds to conceive nor language to express. Doubtless as he surveys an eternal weight of glory in which he has neither part nor lot, and an accumulation of mysterious anguish which is his portion for ever, his memory will be thrown back on all the gracious intentions of his Maker which he had disregarded or despised. But, beloved friends, we wish not to dwell on this affecting scene. God forbid that we should now be preaching to any, who are destined to compass within their own experience what is comprehended in the bitter pains of eternal death. And yet is not the fact worthy of serious reflection, that with respect to some among yourselves, the first intention of preaching has been defeated for ever; that its affecting appeal has found within your breast no kind response; that under all its illuminations you closed the faculty of spiritual perception, a faculty which nature had denied and grace alone had given;—is it not worthy of seasonable attention, that the business of your life has been to blink the question of

death and judgment, to resist the Holy Ghost, and to indulge a shameless hardihood, that can be silenced only under some overwhelming affliction? Is not the fact worthy of attention, that even much of this last merciful provision of Heaven for the salvation of sinners, has been expended in your case in vain; that you have received the smitings of a Parental hand, here a little and there a little, until it may be asked of you, as of ancient Israel, "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more."* O! seasonably remember, my impenitent hearer, that but one end, besides *that* which in your case has been long defeated, can be served by preaching to you the Gospel of Christ. This is to silence the effrontery of your rebel spirit under the final decision of your Judge. *Then* that conviction will overwhelm you, which you now effectually resist, and that Saviour who died to redeem you will, by an endless sentence, vindicate for ever the inflexible justice of Almighty God. Repent, then, and be reconciled to God, we beseech you. Accept the gracious invitations of your Redeemer; receive with meekness His ingrafted Word; bring to His altar a spirit humbled under the impression of your guilt; acknowledge your wretchedness, and wash you in that precious blood which cleanseth from all sin. Suffer a few words, my Reverend Brother, in application to your own circumstances of the principle involved in the text. A higher aspect of authority awaits your ministry. You, in common with your fellow-laborers in the Gospel of Christ, will recognize in our subject at once an incentive to ministerial fidelity, and an antidote to despondence under the numerous discouragements which you

* Isaiah i. 5.

must necessarily encounter. However much to be desired is the more obvious success in the prosecution of your ministry, yet you will remember, that as mere success attests in itself neither Divine authority nor mission, but may exist, as it often does, in severance from both; so the mere want of success can afford, in itself, no just ground either for idleness in your hands or for despondence in your heart. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that."* The obligation upon you, my Rev. Brother, is not to be successful, but to be faithful; not to fulfil your own, but the will of Him that sent you. "Open thy mouth, and eat that which I give thee." Remember, moreover, that in common with your brethren here present, you are sent not to a people of a strange speech, but to one of a strange spirit; the hardness we encounter is not in language, but in heart. We minister among a people of exalted but perverted privileges. Corruption, therefore, not ignorance, characterizes that blindness which will neither receive nor appreciate the Gospel you dispense. But, my Rev. Brother, be not thou rebellious as that rebellious house. In the same degree as this effrontery prevails, will gracious qualifications be required on your part. In your gentleness only will their contentious spirits find a rebuke; in your forbearance only will their hostility be assuaged; in meekness will it become you to instruct those that oppose themselves, if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and to whatever extent under your ministry impenitence may defeat the pri-

* Eccl. xi. 6.

mary intentions of the Gospel, still remember, a new and an interesting aspect of your office is suggested in our text. Under all your discouragements, you may, therefore, cease not to teach and to preach Jesus Christ, to enrich the hearts of your people with sacred knowledge, and to store their minds with redeeming materials from the Word of God. And O! what an inexpressible comfort is it to think, that perhaps after many days—perhaps when, with that of the Prophet, your own head shall repose in the dust, and your instrumentality with his in advancing the gracious purposes of Heaven, has closed for ever; your faithful ministrations of sacred truth may begin to flourish amidst the afflictive visitations of Parental love, and to bloom and to bring forth fruit to the honor of your Lord. Another's, indeed, may be the lighter task to reap where he has not sown, and to gather where he has not strewed; but it will be your higher privilege to look down, and to sympathize with angels in the repentance of a people whose hearts your ministry had enriched against the evil day. Yours will be the consolation of the Prophet—yours the joy to have laid deep, and in the hearts of those for whom Christ died, a good foundation for repentance against the time to come. Go forth, then, to your labor, my Rev. Brother; go in the spirit of love and of a sound mind; and may that blessed Spirit which governs and sanctifies the Church, abide with you and comfort your heart, and accomplish, in you and by your ministry, His purposes of everlasting mercy, through Christ our Lord.—Amen.

SERMON XLII.

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY A PRIESTHOOD.

“ And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.”—2 Cor. v. 18.

IN the orderly arrangement of Christian doctrine, set forth by the Church in the Collects and Epistles, we find a place among the Advent Sundays assigned to the nature and institution of the Christian ministry.

The importance of scriptural views in relation to the Gospel ministry may be inferred from the fact, that on no one point of doctrine has a wider latitude of persuasion been claimed among professing Christians. On no one point is the inconsistency of Creed more apparent. If on one side we have to lament the prevalence of overwrought doctrine in relation to the ministry; of sentiments carried out beyond all scriptural warrant, as well as beyond all precedent, in the earliest and purest ages of the Church; on the other side, we cannot be insensible to the lamentable spectacle presented by those who have felt themselves as free to rid the Gospel ministry of its commission, as they have been to rid Faith of its mysteries and the Sacraments of their invisible power. Still there is Scripture doctrine in relation to this matter, and this is the doctrine which, with all fidelity, we shall now endeavor to lay before you. We may here premise that the Scripture doctrine of the Ministry, in common with all other doctrines of the Gospel, involves mystery. There is something in it proposed to our faith, not to our intellect. By which is meant, that besides its prophetic office,

or office of teaching—and its regal office, or office of governing within the Church, it combines what in our text is termed a ministry of reconciliation or Priesthood, which in itself is a great mystery to us.

The sacerdotal function, therefore, or priestly office, or “ministry of reconciliation,” is matter of faith, not of sight—not of debate, not of contention. This is the very point on which the Christian world is divided. Some, like Thomas, have fallen into the error of the wicked; they believe only so far as they can see; and because they can witness the process and effects of mere teaching and ruling, while they see nothing of the holy mysteries of reconciliation with which the faithful steward is put in trust, they reject both the stewardship and its peculiar ministrations. They are willing, indeed, to heap to themselves teachers, and to appoint to themselves rulers; but to them the priesthood is an offence.

In the mean time the record of Scripture remains the same. The one Faith of the Holy Catholic Church remains the same. The Epistle for Sunday last* opens with this language: “Let a man so account of us as ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” To proceed. That our Lord was solemnly anointed by the Holy Ghost on initiation into office, is readily admitted by all. He is manifested to us in the Gospel as receiving the Holy Ghost, that he might be believed on by us as giving. This is the principle which, within the Church, now governs. The people, as interested in the gifts of the priesthood, witness the Priest’s authoritative consecration to that holy mystery. He freely receives the Holy Ghost for his office

* Third Sunday in Advent.

and work, that he may freely minister the same. And he is manifested to our faith as *receiving*, that we may believe in his stewardship of holy mysteries. All admit, we say, that our Lord was invested with the triple office of a ministry of teaching, a ministry of reconciliation, and a ministry of rule. The question then arises, Were the apostles, after our Lord's ascension, true representatives of Christ in this triple office according to their degree? In the first place, no one doubts that the anointing they received involved the office of teaching. Go ye therefore, said our Lord, and teach, or disciple, all nations.* "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me."† That the Apostles understood themselves to have received from Christ power to preach, we may learn from their Epistles. Thus to the Thessalonians, "He, therefore, that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit."‡ Thus it appears; as the Father sent the Son to preach good tidings, so the Son sent the Apostles to preach the same. He that heareth the one, heareth the other: and he that despiseth the one, despiseth the other. In the second place, no question is made that the anointing which the Apostles received, involved the regal office, or power to rule in the spirit of their commission, within the Church. "I appoint unto you a kingdom," said our Lord, "as my Father hath appointed unto me: that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."§ How the Apostles themselves understood this commission, we may learn from their Epistles. "They

* Mat. xxviii. 19. † Luke x. 16. ‡ 1 Thess. iv. 8. § Luke xxii. 29.

took the oversight of the flock of God, not, indeed, as lords over God's heritage, but as subordinate rulers, and accountable for their ministration of the Church to the chief Shepherd, then sitting at the right hand of God." They wrenched not from Christ, indeed, his supremacy as some have virtually done; but agreeably with their commission, they sat on their respective thrones—some as the Apostles of the Gentiles, some as the Apostles of the Circumcision. They deemed the Episcopate to be one,* of which each Apostle had an equal part. Each exercised within his own jurisdiction his appropriate share of the Apostleship, not boasting himself of other men's labors, or as the margin reads, within another man's "Rule." In general council, as we read in the Acts, they sat, in the language of their commission, on thrones, "judging the twelve tribes of Israel;" or as we should now express it, they sat in council as so many independent Bishops, deliberating on, and determining matters which concerned the whole body of the Church; settling the Creed as controversies arose; establishing forms of sound words; instituting rites; issuing pastoral letters; ordaining ministers; sending forth missionaries; in a word, performing all those duties which devolved on them as men to whom a Spiritual Kingdom had been appointed. The inspired exhortations, we may observe, run parallel with this primitive, this orderly, this edifying ecclesiastical polity. "Remember them which have the rule over you, whose faith follow."† And again, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account."‡

* *Episcopatus unus, cujus a singulis in solidum pars tenetur.*—CYPRIAN. *De Unit. Eccl.*

† Heb. xiii. 7.

‡ Heb. xiii. 7.

And again, "Salute all them that have the rule over you."* All of which exhortations would seem to imply a reverential, an affectionate submission of ourselves, as the flock of God, to the godly judgment and rule of our ecclesiastical superiors: repressing within ourselves a gainsaying and disobedient temper of mind; not speaking evil of them but under solemn affirmation; not receiving an accusation against them on single, weak, or vindictive testimony; not bringing, ourselves, a railing accusation against them; but proceeding, on all proper occasions of impeachment, by canonical rule, and under a religious sense of the necessity of such procedure, and of the high responsibilities we therein incur. It is observable with what importunity the Apostle beseeches the people "to know them which labor among them, and are over them in the Lord, and admonish them, and to esteem them very highly for their works' sake." † The reason is obvious. Ministers are sent out as sheep among wolves. They have no complaints to make, no resistance to oppose, no resentments to indulge, no penalties to inflict. Their appeal, under all the injurious imputations of ignorance, misconception or malice, lies to the Chief Shepherd, to whom alone vengeance belongeth. Their peculiar spirit, and their conviction of the responsibility they must incur when evil entreated, incite to intercession rather than to resentment—to patient endurance rather than to recrimination.

That the Apostles, then, in their proportionate degree, did fairly represent our Lord in his prophetic and regal office, we think is clearly settled by the tenor of Scripture. "He that heareth you, heareth

* Heb. xiii. 24.

† 1 Thess. v. 12.

me ; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me." So also, "I appoint unto you a kingdom."

The next question arising is, Whether our Lord was really and truly represented by the Apostles in his "ministry of reconciliation" or sacerdotal office? In other words, Were the Apostles as truly Christian priests as they were Christian teachers and rulers? Now, a Christian priest is an organ of the Holy Ghost: an appointed channel of holy mysteries to the soul, when that soul is rightly affected. In Scripture, he is accounted a steward of the mysteries of God, and dispenses those invisible blessings which Christ hath obtained for us, truly and effectively to the household of faith. Eminently among these invisible blessings is the authoritative conveyance of the forgiveness of sins to the truly penitent, in Church forms of absolution. Thus, according to his office, and under the measured grace of the Spirit, does he distribute beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

There is with many Christians, and even under great emergencies, an exceeding loose, unscriptural, and irreverent estimate of the Christian Priesthood and its sacred instrumentality. The unsubdued pride in their hearts resists the humiliating appointments of Almighty God. They ask, but they ask amiss. They come, but they come amiss. They are heard not. They are sent empty away. They are ashamed of God's ways. A wicked and an unbelieving world has its taunt of priestcraft, and the fear of being subjected to this taunt, is permitted to defraud the soul of those spiritual blessings, which are of indispensable moment to her health and well-being. Now our text, with wonderful perspicuity, presents this point of our inquiry in the most

satisfactory view. It assures us that all things are of God; by the mediation of Jesus Christ, who hath reconciled us to God; through the "ministry of reconciliation" which was committed to the Apostles. "He breathed on them," says the Evangelist, "and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."* That the Apostles interpreted the power here received, as their endowment with the Priestly office or ministry of reconciliation, and this as distinct from their commission to preach and to rule, is clear from our text: "And hath given unto us the ministry of reconciliation." And it would be difficult to show that this proposition, in its order in the economy of grace, has received less sanction than those other two which precede it. We mean that all spiritual blessings are of God, and that our reconciliation unto Him is effected by the mediatory sacrifice of the Redeemer. For as these first two propositions prove that, between God and man, there is one mediator, the man Christ Jesus, so the third shows that the "ministry of reconciliation," or the office of administering this office of reconciliation to men, was intrusted with the Apostles as the organs of the Holy Ghost. "Let a man so account of us"—not merely as ministers of Christ to teach all nations and to take the oversight of the flock of God—but "as stewards of the mysteries of God."†

But one objects, this power has been abused. We cannot help that. Another objects, that auricular confession has been added. We cannot help that. Another still, that the sacraments have been multiplied

* John xx. 23.

† 1 Cor. iv. 1.

to enlarge the sphere of the priest. Neither can we help that. The abuse, or perversion, or unwarranted extension of standing office calls for reform; and we may add, so does the unwarranted abridgment of office, or infidelity to its ministrations. If a man, indeed, in the language of the Church, "cannot quiet his own conscience, but requireth further comfort or counsel," we know of no provision of the Gospel more applicable to the necessity of his case, or one more likely to be attended with God's blessing, than that lodged with the Christian priesthood. But the requirement of an indiscriminate auricular confession, or the multiplication of sacraments, is a novelty in religion which our Church has wisely rejected.*

It may here be proper to remark, prominently, that the Christian priesthood, being itself only representative and commemorative, so also must be its priestly acts. These do not originate or procure grace, but are

* [EXTRACT FROM A SERMON PREACHED IN 1849:—"But there are cases of sin, the misery of which cannot be reached by a public confession in general terms. The Church supposes such exceptions and records her counsel: 'And because it is requisite that no man should come to the Holy Communion but with a full trust in God's mercy, and with a quiet conscience, therefore, if there be any of you who by these means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other minister of God's word, and open his grief, that he may receive such godly counsel and advice as may tend to the quieting of his conscience and the removing of all scruple and doubtfulness.' Now, to 'open one's grief,' in its meaning, is to disclose to the minister of God's word the particular sin from which scruples and doubtfulness in respect of communing have arisen. The man cannot quiet his own conscience; he cannot feel a full trust in God's mercy; his sin oppresses him. What then? Is he, on one pretence or another, and upon his own responsibility, to abstain from Holy Communion? Why, to evade the Communion on such ground, this would be, spiritually, a suicidal act. The Church owns no such custom. She counsels that to the use of ordinary means of preparation he add 'the opening of his grief' to some Minister of the Gospel, to the end he may be quieted, and comforted, and encouraged by godly ministration, and instead of flying the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, be brought devoutly thereto, being assured thereby of God's goodness and favor towards him."]

ministrations only under the all-gracious administration of Christ, the one only and continuous sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. There is no other like this precious sacrifice, or second after it. It has been made once for all. It is not the highest of a kind—but stands apart by itself, the sole grand and universal meritorious cause of all spiritual blessings. But the whole work, in the individual application of benefits derived from the cross, is assigned to the Holy Ghost, of whom the priesthood is the appointed organ. A sinner may truly exercise repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, but the mysterious priesthood, with its holy sacraments, must still collate their sealing power. The Scriptures cannot be broken. “Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins.”* The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? The cup, which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?† From what has been said, we may perceive the extent of our Lord’s meaning, in that declaration, “As the Father sent me—so send I you.”‡ The Father appointed him a kingdom, and a kingdom he appointed them. The Father invested him with a triple office, and with a triple office in measure he invested them. The question arises, Are the successors of the Apostles, in common with the Apostles themselves, as truly invested? We answer, most unquestionably. That there is a certain marked line of distinction between the Apostles and their successors, all readily admit. The Apostles were first founders of the Church, with occasional and extraordinary endowments for this end, and which ceased

* Acts xxii. 16.

† 1 Cor. x. 16.

‡ John xx. 21.

with themselves. Thus, for instance, they were organs of revelation, inspired teachers, gifted with divers tongues, workers of miracles. As founders of the Church, and signally gifted for this end, they need no successors—they can have none. Other foundation can no man lay; because other foundation can no man need. We see the fact illustrated in every department of a merciful Providence around us, that the duration of any gift depends on the need which it supplies. The Apostle himself, to the Corinthians, makes the important distinction which is here noticed.* “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation and another buildeth thereon;” which would seem to imply a manifest line of distinction between an inspired founder and his successor, as also between the grace of God in its measure and kind, in the one case and in the other. That this distinction concerns only extraordinary endowments however, for a peculiar work, there can be no doubt. But that it should affect the standing triple office of Christ which the Apostles, in their proportional degree, represented, would be to suppose that the need of the world would be continued without the gift for its supply. Our Lord himself has virtually decided this interesting point, by pledging his Apostolic presence to the end of the world. The language is very remarkable and significant. “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”† How shall we interpret this language? That the Apostles themselves, as men, were not to be held in perpetuity by the Church, is certain. These have all died. That Christ’s presence in them, as manifested in their extra-

* 1 Cor. iii. 10.

† Matt. xxviii. 20.

ordinary gifts, is not implied, is equally certain ; these have all ceased ; and yet there must be a sense in which, and by means of the Apostles, Christ would be with the Church to the end of time. But one interpretation can be given, and that which ever has been, now is, and to the end of time will be, the interpretation of the Holy Catholic Church—Christ will be Apostolically present with their successors in the triple office, and to the end of time.

Take from the Apostles that extraordinary portion of gift, which exclusively pertained to them as inspired founders, and the portion that remains—whether in the prophetic, regal, or sacerdotal department of their office—was destined by our Lord to reach the day of his coming, through all intervening ages ; and we may ask, why should it not ? Will the necessities of the Church, in any given age, have ceased, that the ordained channel for their supply should have disappeared ? Will the last generation of men have been less redeemed by the precious blood of Christ ?—or will the Holy Ghost, the administrator, be less needed ? Will organs of the Holy Ghost, in the administration, be less required, in accommodation to the nature and infirmity of man ? Certainly not. Scripture itself forbids the thought. Mark this memorable passage : “ Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion in due season ? Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.”* How interesting this discovery which concerns the last day ! Come when the Lord may, our Holy Mother, the Church, will be up and doing, the faithful

* Luke xii. 42.

steward of God : holy mysteries will be found in place ; the portions will have been dispensed in due season : the household will have received the comfort : the souls of the faithful will have been strengthened and refreshed—when lo ! suddenly the Son of Man shall be revealed in the glory of his Father and all the holy angels with him. Truly, beyond all other days, it shall be said in that day, “Lo ! this is our God, we have waited for him and he will save us : this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”*

But if Christ will be apostolically present with his Church in the last day, then it would seem to follow as an inevitable induction, that he is now apostolically present. He has not left us orphaned and comfortless. The Holy Ghost abideth with us. The official organs of that blessed Spirit are in the Church. The economy of grace *has* not been, *will* not be, disturbed either by the world’s vociferation, or by the timidity or perfidy of professing Christians under the world’s dread taunt. He that here despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit. Could the Christian priesthood have been arbitrarily dispensed with in a single instance, this we might antecedently have supposed would be furnished in the case of St. Paul himself. He was miraculously converted. Christ supernaturally appeared to him in person, and to this end, to make him a minister and a witness. Christ himself appointed among the Gentiles his apostolical jurisdiction, sent him forth to turn the Heathen from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God ; and yet the further narrative of that inter-

* Isa. xxv. 9.

esting event discloses this remarkable truth, that Saul was never delivered from the chain of his sins, until through Ananias, and in the appointed sacrament of baptism, the invisible grace was applied like an unction to his penitent and believing soul. "And now why tarriest thou?" said Ananias. "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins." We see how little ground the Scriptures afford, and how dangerous a habit of mind it must be, to foster within ourselves loose and presumptuous notions, and in matters where the soul is concerned. Will it avail in one's behalf, that he thought with the world around him? that its unbelief was the rule of his conduct, and its taunt the terror of his heart? Beloved friends, it would ill become us in place to withhold the expression of our fears, that the guilt implied in being ashamed of the priesthood is in some degree but too prevalent among us. An unbelieving world too strongly retains upon us its withering grasp. We, indeed, may group together in the ordinances of religion, and in countenance uphold one another; but, in the event of any individual case, where the Christian priesthood should be duly recognized and honored as the organ of the Holy Ghost, as in the visitation of the sick, or in the comforting of the heart under any emergency, or in the quieting of the conscience, what shameful backwardness is there not evinced? Is any sick among you, and made to feel the necessity of Divine help? Is there any afflicted in heart or in conscience, and made to feel their own insufficiency? What is your duty? What is your privilege, but to call for the Presbyters* of the Church, the stewards of the mysteries of God, and receive the consolations of

* St. James v. 14.

faith and prayer, which may God in mercy ever vouchsafe to be yours, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



SERMON XLIII.

CONFIRMATION, OR THE YOKE OF CHRIST TAKEN.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”—St. Matt. xi. 29.

WE have selected a passage of Scripture that may lead to observations not unsuited to the expected visitation of our Bishop. He comes among us, in the language of the Apostle, “in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of peace.”* The end of this visitation is twofold: first, to edify the Church; and secondly, in the rite of Confirmation, to offer, in God’s name, the yoke of Christ to such as may now feel their obligation to take it upon themselves. “Receive us,”† says an Apostle, our persons, our office, our doctrines, our ministrations. “We have wronged no man; we have corrupted no man; we have defrauded no man.” “We are of God,” continues the Apostle. The authority and rule we exercise is derived from God, and under seal of the Gospel kingdom. The doctrines we preach are of Divine origination, and tend to the ennoblement and final glorification of the bodies and souls of men. The end of our ministry is the advancement of God’s glory, the honor of our Redeemer, the vindication of the Holy Ghost, and the joy of angels in the present peace and

* Rom. xv. 29.

† 2 Cor. vii. 2.

everlasting blessedness of the Redeemer. "Receive us." The chief officer of the Church is himself a yoke-bearer with Christ, subject to the constitution and laws of that kingdom of which Christ is the exalted Head. And in God's name he may offer the fellowship of this yoke to others the more confidently, as having cordially and gratefully taken it upon himself.

Our Lord himself inculcates not upon others a religious principle in relation to which he himself, in the Covenant of Redemption, claims an exemption; but makes his own example of obedience to his Father's will the ground of his reasonable claim and expectation upon others. This appears to be the import of the passage before us, and by transposing the sentences it will the more plainly appear. The text will then read, "Take my yoke upon you, for I am meek and lowly in heart; learn of me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." It is no part of our Lord's purpose, neither would it consist with the object of his mission, that they who, at so costly a sacrifice, had been saved from sin and eternal death, should now, under any pretence of religion, become the victims of usurped power, or of grievous imposition, or of severe and rigorous exaction. A quiet, cheerful spirit of family subordination, is indeed an indispensable feature of his religion, and essential to our individual happiness and welfare. In this sense the yoke of Christ is easy to a well-ordered mind, and his burden light; his ways are ways of pleasantness, and all his paths are peace; the required subordination is a reasonable service on our part, the grateful incense of the heart, good in itself, and acceptable to God.

The text may be considered as stating our Lord's claim in relation to baptized persons, and secondly, as

encouraging those who shall sacredly regard this claim. First, the claim itself: "Take my yoke upon you." By Christ's yoke we may understand the restraints which his religion imposes on the predispositions and tendencies of our fallen nature. As there is one Body, and one Lord at the head of it, and one Baptism to incorporate our little children as well as penitent believers into it, so there is one Spirit to which all the members of the body are to be brought into subjection, and by which they are to be influenced, in order to secure to the whole body, and to the members in particular, one happy result in time and in eternity. The Holy Spirit, therefore, is to the Church the centre of unity and the bond of peace; and as the Episcopal office is to us an ecclesiastical form and visible representation of this Divine government, so in fellowship with this office, and especially in the rite of Confirmation, one of its peculiar ministrations, we are all made, as the Apostle expresses it, "to drink into this one Spirit."* In this rite we submit the pride of our rebellion to a godly rule—surrender unto the Church of Christ the loftiness of a lawless individuality; and like Moses, choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Hence, in a very peculiar sense, to take Christ's yoke upon us is a free, affectionate act on our parts. However rightfully and at an early age we may have been baptized into the Church, this charitable work on the part of others in our behalf does not meet the requirement of the text: the man's own mind and heart are here supposed to be deeply interested in this proceeding. It is our Lord's claim on the individual, while

* 1 Cor. xii. 13.

prosecuting his own gracious work of salvation, and each for himself, and in the gracious spirit and affection of his own mind, must willingly and gratefully assent thereto. "Take my yoke upon you"—cheerfully acquiesce in the restraints of my religion.

The ground, on which in the text our Lord urges this reasonable claim, we may perceive is fixed in his own example of submission to his Father's will: "For I am meek and lowly in heart." Meekness of heart is opposed to the pride of rebellion, and lowliness of heart is opposed to the licentiousness of disobedience. "Though he were a son," says an Apostle, "yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."* He assumed not his official station, as head over all things unto the Church. He ascended not on high until he had trodden the wine-press, until by a series of expiatory sufferings, terminating in an ignominious and cruel death, he was perfected and fitted for that exalted station in the Church. The demands on him were the rigorous exactions of inflexible Holiness, claiming the uttermost farthing of that penalty which our sins had incurred. But in every stage of his humiliation, the meekness and lowliness of his heart were exhibited, and after many and diversified sorrows and griefs, he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus the whole Church, whether on earth, or in the place of departed spirits, should bow under the deepest sentiments of reverence and of devout affection. Under these circumstances how impressive becomes the appeal in our text, and to ourselves,

* Heb. v. 8.

individually. The qualities of meekness and lowliness which our Lord here affirms of his own character, may be considered either as referring to the tenderness and benignity of his own administration of the Church, or to his own submissiveness to his Father's will, in becoming an expiatory sacrifice for our sins; or with the strictest propriety they may embrace this twofold reference. If we consider them as indicating the tenderness and benignity of his administration, they afford great encouragement to seriously affected but timid and distrustful persons, to come forward in dependence on the Holy Spirit, and in the rite of Confirmation calmly and devoutly to take upon themselves the yoke of their Redeemer. Let such persons remember that the benign disposition of the Redeemer, set forth in our text, gives character to his administration, and is a pledge to us that the Family of God, over which he presides, will be subjected to no grievous impositions, nor to any severities which his grace will not enable them to endure.

The tenderness of his pastoral care is beautifully depicted by the pen of inspiration; and we have recorded assurances that the bruised reed he will not break, nor quench the smoking flax. Every humble aspiration of a devout mind, every sincere effort put forth in dependence on his grace, he will appreciate. Every rebuke inflicted on the pride of our nature, he will treasure in remembrance. His eyes are over his people, and his ears are open to their prayers.

But if we consider the words as respecting our Lord's own obedience to his Father's will, then in the meekness and lowliness of his temper and disposition of mind, all baptized persons have an illustrious example set before them, which, at this particular juncture, merits their most serious attention.

Our Lord might, indeed, have resisted both the necessities in our case and his Father's will in executing the plan of Salvation. There was neither obligation on his part, nor merit on ours. He might have left our race to the forewarned demerit of its own apostasy and guilt. He himself was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God. He was surrounded with ineffable glory, and inspired the joys of an innumerable company of adoring angels. But in mercy a Covenant of Redemption was devised, in which his own humiliation was involved. It was the will of his Father, nor less required in reconciling his immaculate holiness with our redemption, that he, the Lamb of God, should disrobe himself of all his glory, which he had with the Father before the world was. He staggered not at these rigorous commands of unbending Holiness; nor yet at the depths of humiliation which opened before him. His mind is recorded: "Lo I come; in the Volume of the Book it is written of me, that I should fulfil thy will, O my God; I am content to do it, yea, thy law is within my heart."* "He made himself of no reputation. He took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross."† O what an illustrious example of submission to moral government have we not here set before us! Truly the Son of God was meek and lowly in heart. No pride of rebellion, no lawlessness of disobedience, found a place within that sacred breast. He finished the work. Yes, God was reconciled to sinners; the law magnified and made honorable. A

* Ps. xl. 10.

† Phil. ii. 8.

way opened for our return to God and restoration to his favor; and now, and especially at this time, he makes his appeal to those for whom the benefit was intended. "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me." And, say, beloved friends, may not the divine Redeemer of our race now reasonably expect, that the mind which was in himself, should be found also in us; and that we, for whose sake this humiliation was endured by him, and these inestimable benefits secured, should now heartily acquiesce in that family subordination which is the law of his kingdom?

We proceed, secondly, to consider the encouragement to those whose hearts sacredly respond to this claim of our Lord's. "They shall find rest to their souls." Follow me in my peculiar spirit, and you shall share in my peculiar rewards. When our Lord had by himself purged our sins, and set for our imitation an illustrious example of compliance with the will of God, he sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high. This is his rest. And what its peculiar glory and enjoyments are we cannot tell; but we know that however transcendently glorious this rest may be, *we*, if obedient to his example, and submissive to that spirit which pervades the Church, shall be made partakers of that rest. For there remaineth a rest for the people of God, of which, in the humility of their spirits and in their renewed obedience, they have now an indisputable token and pledge. As the yoke we now take upon us is Christ's yoke, so the rest on which we shall enter is termed "his rest." And O! what a persuasive motive is not here furnished to us all to follow the obedience of Christ. Some among you will doubtless manifest your appreciation of this motive on the approaching visitation. Your susceptibilities of religious

impression have not been blunted by years of indulgence in the pride and recklessness of a rebellious heart. There is yet within your breast a generous sensibility to the claims of him, who purchased your redemption with his blood. Resist not these sacred claims, we beseech you. Refuse not to humble yourselves before God. Rather yield ye yourselves as servants of righteousness unto holiness. Even in the present life, you will reap to your souls a foretaste of that rest promised in our text. That serpent's head, which has erected itself in opposition to the yoke of the Redeemer, will, in your confirmation, under the graces of the Spirit, receive a blow, under which, through God's strength, it shall not rise again in proud defiance. Your nature, hitherto oppressed and held under a vile usurpation, will begin to escape from its thralldom, and to anticipate the glorious liberty of the children of God. And when you come to die—for die we must—this rest, in a comfortable degree, will abide on your spirit. You, too, will illustrate what we have often been privileged to behold—a yoke-bearer with Christ, in the most trying circumstances of his nature, approached on all sides by the shades of death and the solemnities of eternity, yet calmly relying on a Saviour who had taught him obedience. This death-bed scene, indeed, is a glorious comment on the blessedness of the meek and lowly in heart. But it is in that exalted state alone, now occupied by our Redeemer, and for which his followers are destined, that we shall realize the consummation of our rest. Then we shall know in what that exaltation consists, which awaits the man who, in unfeigned humiliation of spirit and in the divine appointments, takes upon himself the yoke of the Crucified One. We shall then see our Redeemer as he is,

and with him possess and enjoy that fulness of felicity which now eye cannot see, which now ear cannot hear, and which now the heart of man cannot conceive. Then, in pious wonder, we shall adore those operations of the divine Spirit, under which our corrupted nature was renovated and ourselves conducted through many changes, and sorrows, and trials, to the unfading glory of an eternal rest. O! then, let not the precious opportunity soon to be afforded us pass by unimproved. Let us profit by the example of obedience left us by our Lord. Whatever portion of our past existence may have run to waste, let our resolve for the future be made up with our great Exemplar, "Lo! I come to do thy will, O my God!"



SERMON XLIV.

GRADATION IN RELIGIOUS LIFE.

"Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you."—St. John xv. 15.

THESE words of our Lord would seem to imply a gradation in the Christian life—at least, two distinct but well-connected relations which, in the rise and progress of his faith, the Christian sustains to God—to the Redeemer—to the Holy Spirit—to the Church—to every visible and invisible power now engaged in his spiritual recovery. A consideration of this economy will make the subject of our present discourse. The question, "What must I do to be saved?" would arise

very naturally in the case of those who, from whatever cause, had been deprived of early religious instruction, but who, in subsequent life, have been awakened to a sense of religion. In such cases the entrance on a religious course of life must necessarily be attended with peculiar difficulties. In the first place, habits of thought have been formed adverse to the genius and spirit of true religion. The man has been moulded on the principle of sight—has ventured but little beyond the depth of his natural powers—requires to be assured in the outset of final success. All such habits, with many others, find no place in true religion, but are positively adverse to its rise and progress within the soul. Another difficulty he has to encounter is, in the magnitude of the work before him. Its greatness opens at once upon his vision, and serves but to perplex and discourage his beginning. He knows not how or where to begin. He knows not what to do in order to be saved. He knows nothing of the low rooms at the feast, nor of the gradations by which the kingdom of heaven is reached. He knows nothing of the discipline of self-renunciation—nothing of the bearing of single and distinctive acts of obedience on the general result. All that preparatory discipline implied in early religious culture, and under which the great but invisible work, however unconsciously to its subject, was forwarded in the soul, is wanting in his case. The man has now to be born, as it were, when he is old—has to unlearn all the lessons of his worldly wisdom—and when for the time he ought to be a teacher, he has need that one teach him which be the first principles of the oracles of God. He is of necessity unskilful in spiritual warfare; knows not the proprieties of a servant, nor the privilege which pertains to a friend,

nor how nor by what means a Christian is advanced from strength to strength, and from one step of recovery to another. Another difficulty he has to meet is found in the confirmed pride of his nature, wilfulness, and self-sufficiency. He cannot stoop to the docility of spiritual wisdom. He himself indeed may be a man of authority, and may have servants under him; and he may say unto one, Come, and he cometh; and to another, Do this, and he doeth it. But now, when he himself is to be called of his Lord; a servant, and as such to be put under spiritual authority; to be admitted to no confidence; to obey only for the word's sake, and this with seemingly no profit to himself, and in ignorance of his Lord's aims or ends; then the requisition is deemed by him to be severe. Pride rises up, and the man is offended, and his wilfulness refuses and rebels. Thousands, like Naaman, turn aside from the holy commandment of Christ in a rage, quit the service of so austere a master, as they deem him, and seek other lords and other gods, by whom their natural claims and expectations will be better regarded.

In connection with these difficulties, no small one arises from the fact, that differences of opinion exist on the question, what constitutes a right qualification to enter formally on the work of religion, or how, or at what point the entrance is to be made. Some would seem to insist on very high qualifications, and others would seem to fly off into an opposite extreme. The former insist on high-wrought affections as of indispensable moment to any right or acceptable service. Hence the mental discipline implied in taking ground as a servant in the father's house is unappreciated by them. They claim at once to be admitted under the appellation of friends; and, in order to force up the feelings into some

fancied agreement with the stand they have assumed, they aim for religious excitement. High-wrought sensibility, is confounded by them with spiritual affection. Hence all the machinery adapted to this end is laid under requisition. They value only what may be termed the sensuous luxury of religious feeling. They nurse impassioned thoughts, high aspirations, sublime imaginings, and forthwith are to be admitted into full confidence with their Lord. The previous training of the disciples by our Lord they overlook. The antecedent relation of a servant, indicated in our text, finds no place in their system. The very evidence of discipleship they require is, the knowledge of what their Lord doeth. The Christian must speak confidently of his spiritual state. Now, the question at present before us concerns not the judgment of Scripture on these peculiar views of religion. We ourselves are by no means disposed to regard them as some do, with a sweeping denunciation. We certainly do believe that, as a system, it is highly unscriptural and unsafe. Be this as it may, one thing is certain—such views and sentiments wonderfully increase the trials which beset the awakened man; they indispose him to single acts of obedience, or to any sobriety of thought. These would seem to be disparaged in view of such high-wrought requisitions upon him. They render, moreover, less supportable the discipline, which must necessarily attend his entrance into life. For if in the outset of their religion, sinners like himself may come in under the title of friends, be admitted into full confidence, and privileged to know at once what their Lord doeth, and to speak certainly of their own state, of their inward joys, and of sins forgiven, who then can be expected to become servants? The discipline of a servant has no-

thing in itself inviting to our nature, much less joyous ; on the contrary, in itself it is grievous, and is made, to beings like ourselves, supportable only by the well-assured hopes and expectations with which the Gospel has surrounded it. There is a stage in religion partly attainable this side, and fully beyond the grave, when they who are now called servants are admitted into the confidence of their Lord. As servants, they walked in darkness and had no light ; they went often mournfully to their duties ; found, as they supposed, no profit in praying, nor in keeping ordinances, nor in the observance of any other commanded duty ; they knew not what their Lord was about, could not fathom his aims or intentions ; still, with a servant's propriety, they trusted in the Lord, and stayed their souls upon their God. Now they are called friends ; have been told of many heavenly things ; have come up higher. The heart has become interested, the affections lively and undissembled. Even in this world, the friends of Christ have foretastes of heavenly communion. They catch glimpses of the eternal world, and amidst all the vexations which pertain to these lower abodes, they rejoice in hope of the glory of God ; but only where Christ is will they realize the fulness of the revelation indicated in our text. Then will they become friends indeed, and fully appreciate the relation ; be received into the unreserved confidence of their Lord ; will know even as they are known ; will understand all the discipline through which, as servants, they were led ; will understand the profit, in their Lord's line of view, which had resulted in praying, in keeping ordinances, in obeying the word for the word's sake, irrespective of any discoveries then made of the Lord's aim or end in these requirements. But these peculiar difficulties, which

result from the unscriptural and extravagant views and sentiments of many, are not the only ones which the awakened man has to encounter. A stumbling-block lies before him in the manifest inconsistencies of those who, although we might now expect them, after so long a time of discipleship, to be acknowledged as friends by their Lord, to enjoy a large measure of his confidence, and to shine as lights in the world, yet need themselves to do their first works, to take with shame the lowest place, to count for a blessing the relation of a hired servant, and to be again put on obedience to the word for the word's sake. A man truly awakened by the Spirit of God, can never reconcile his mind and feelings to the wretched compound of formality, and worldliness, exhibited in the religion of many. He craves another aspect of religion, and would choose the wildest form of frenzied sensibility, rather than sit down contented with a religion, which in reality only the world has inspired. True religion, indeed, like the foot of Jacob's ladder, has its low place; but even here, it embraces the best affections, and through these rises and changes from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. Its subject is no longer called a servant, but a friend, and however disclaiming in himself, is freely admitted into the confidence and affection of his Lord. He is as one awaiting higher revelations, to invigorate his affections, and to raise them into nobler degrees of warmth and ardor. Now all these, and many other difficulties, beset a man whose early religious culture has been neglected, but who in after life has been awakened to some sense of serious things. But, with attention to the import of our text, and with the ordinary assistance of the Spirit, the mind, however perplexed, need not despair. Should there be

any such present, who would enter into life, let them mark, that the relation of a servant to Christ, with whatever hopes of preferment surrounded, is the only relation which the Gospel, in its beginning, sets before our eyes. We must begin religion in the capacity of a servant, and with a willing mind; by which we mean an unconditional surrender of ourselves to God, in his own way; and this not so much in view of pardon as the end of such surrender, as in view of the righteous claims of the Benefactor whose government we have so long opposed. The sinner, as such, is contemplated in Scripture as a rebel, and we know that, antecedent to any thing that can be determined in his case, the rebel must lay down his opposition. There can be no treating with armed rebels—no propositions from them can be received; no self-devised offerings on their part, as in the case of Cain, can be respected. In our spiritual recovery there can be no bargaining, no corruption, no compromise, no scheming; the very nature of this peculiar spirit shows that the mind of the sinner is not rightly affected: he is radically insincere. In this frame of mind he can never enter into life.

Willing-mindedness is the distinguishing attribute of a servant; and so respected of God is this quality, that where it exists before him, he will accept it, though attended with much imperfection of service. It is the willing mind which brings the sinner to God through Christ, as the appointed Mediator between God and his sinful creatures; and it is the willing mind which brings the sinner to Christ, through the ministry and ordinances of the Church, as the appointed channels of communication between his soul and the Redeemer. Again, would we escape perplexity in the outset of our religious course, we must beware how we overbear our

faith by highly etherealized impressions of religion, which in reality, and for the time, are beyond our measure. Strong meat is convenient food for some, but milk for others. Plain acts of Christian obedience best pertain to the newly awakened sinner. These fix his mind, and enable him to realize his relation to Christ, as an unworthy, yet willing and obedient servant. One indication of a willing mind is, that it leads us to scrutinize the manner in which we perform these plain acts of obedience. There is with some, a careless and irreverent way of doing these things, which might well awaken suspicion of the existence of some radical defect. Mere regularity in the performance is not the only needful in these plain acts of Christian duty. It should be our earnest endeavor, in dependence on the Spirit, that the end of these holy Commandments should be accomplished in us. For religion does not consist in any mere outward observance; but in an invisible work, which through these appointed means, when rightly used, the Holy Spirit operates within us, and carries on, even unto the sanctification of the soul. We can see nothing of this spiritual working, no more than we can see the Spirit which worketh. We can know nothing of what it is in itself. It is described in Scripture as God's husbandry, as God's building, a great work of renewal, which is now being carried on within the inner man, and which, in due time, is destined to break forth in the completeness, the proportion and beauty of the new creation. Its progress is evidenced to us only in certain precious fruits, some of which are perceptible to the inward, and some to the outward eye. We know this much—that our obedience to the Gos-

pel, under the Spirit, contributes effectively to the progress of this invisible work. In this sense only are we said to become co-workers with God. From this view it would seem to follow, that in the same degree as our acts of religious obedience are vitiated by carelessness, indifference, or irreverence, do we defeat their end and intention. We should aim to do service with reverence and godly fear, lest in God's displeasure he consume the work within us, and leave us to incorrigible hardness and impenitency of heart. Further, let us beware of prying into God's work, as though we could find out by searching what our Lord doeth. Such knowledge is denied us; for "the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth." When our Lord would wash his disciples' feet, Peter inquired into the design of his Master; but his inquisitiveness is met with this gentle rebuke: "What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."* As servants, this reply of our Lord to Peter should be inscribed upon our hearts. We should aim rather to approve our fidelity than to be admitted to confidence. Our plain duties are hourly before us, and solicit our due attention and regard; but what our Lord doeth for us, and through the instrumentality of our obedience, is not within the line of our view. Sufficient for us to be assured that, if "willing and obedient, we shall eat the good of the land."† His part he will most surely keep and perform. Yet nothing is more common, even among those who know nothing of religion as they ought to know, than to assume the judgment of the Lord's work in their own case, or in the case of others. They pronounce upon the Lord's doings with an air of confidence, which

* John xiii. 7.

† Is. i. 19.

borders on impiety. One deems himself to have been profited, and another not profited, with no reference to their own fidelity; but the rule of judgment in the case is fallacious. When servants have been incited to a more diligent, reverential, and unwavering performance of their duties, then they may humbly trust they have been profited, because through this performance, as by an instrument, the Holy Spirit advances his invisible work. But if the luxury of religious feeling is to make up the rule, and this without reference to any quickened fidelity, then we deny the conclusion. There has been no profit, and the condition of that humble servant, who has obeyed in reverence and godly fear, is infinitely to be preferred. The work within him he deems to be a work of faith, not of sight. This he confides to the higher power, humbly trusting that the Spirit of Grace which works within him, both to will and to do, will not be remiss in the performance of his own. Once more, we should not be unmindful of the intimation afforded in the text, that the condition of a servant admits of being raised into the relation of a friend. The master condescends to intimacy with servants who know their place and labor to approve their fidelity. He emancipates them, as it were, and receives them again into the higher relation of confidential friends. He makes to them higher, more interesting, and more inspiring discoveries. They begin to see in part, and to know in part, and they are privileged to anticipate the period when, as the Apostle expresses it, "they shall apprehend that for which also they were apprehended of Christ Jesus."* Now, this is a very cheering prospect which opens upon the servant, and

* Phil. iii. 12.

enters essentially into the seasoning of his heart. "Well," we seem to hear him say, "my present engagement is to will and to do, what my Lord has commanded to be done. I am admitted, indeed, into no confidence, know nothing of his designs. He calleth me, and I come. He saith unto me, Do this, and I do it. In all this I perceive no immediate profit to myself, in any human view; I seem rather to walk in darkness, and to have no light; indeed I am not worthy to be called a friend, or to be received into the confidence of my Lord; for my best obedience, I now plainly see, is but disobedience in disguise, which needs to be washed and sanctified. I feel my need of pardon rather than of preferment, and have every reason to be thankful for continued servitude in the house of my God." Now, he that humbleth himself shall be exalted, and considerations of our own indeliberate, and of God's mercy in apprehending us, conducted in dependence on the Spirit, and with the ingenuousness of a lowly mind, will never fail to bring about, in due time, our translation into our Lord's confidence and favor. We shall realize in our hearts something of a closer approximation to our Redeemer, a more abiding inhabitation of his Spirit, increasing frequency in our devout meditations, more enlargement in our sacred contemplations, more fervency in our petitions, and especially when imploring the Holy Spirit to enliven and invigorate our holy affections. But if, while in the occupancy of that low place, we mistake our formality for religion, our presumption for true faith, our self-complacency for the Divine commendation—substituting names for things, and building on these names our hopes of Heaven—we need take care lest our servitude, so far from maturing itself into perfect freedom, return us

to the world, with eyes more blinded than ever, and with hearts hardened into deeper and more indomitable impenitence. That gracious declaration in our text will never be affirmed of us, but rather the curse which consigns to ruin the wicked and slothful servant, the man once apprehended of his Lord, now rejected by him for ever. O! let us aim to approve our fidelity. Let us be grateful to God that our abode is no longer fixed in the tents of ungodliness; that we have been apprehended of Christ Jesus; received into his employ; commanded to come and to go; to do this thing and to deny ourselves of that. Let us be grateful for the abundant provision enjoyed by the hired servants, anticipating the period when we shall be recognized as friends and companions of the Redeemer, and follow Him whithersoever He goeth.



SERMON XLV.

THE CHURCH LED OUT INTO THE WILDERNESS.

“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.”
—Hosea ii. 14, 15.

THE passage shows forth the Divine method of dealing with the Church, intended for her consolation and support under the discipline of the present life. A serious, settled conviction of the Divine rule and governance should for ever intervene between outward desolation and inward dismay. We suppose ourselves

often to be dying under our allotment, and behold we live; and sometimes to be killed, when in reality we are chastened only. Such mistaken thought and consequent impatience and discontent, so common in the world, is the sad fruit of ignorance or disregard of the Divine economy. The Lord will not forsake his people, though, if need be, he chasten with a heavy hand. His purpose is not to kill, but savingly to make alive.

Let us look more particularly into this Divine economy as revealed in the text. The preceding verses refer both to the defection of the Church, and to the visitations of Divine displeasure. As unfaithfulness was her sin, so in unfaithfulness she would find her punishment. Among all her lovers she would find none to comfort her. All her friends would deal treacherously with her; they would become her enemies. She would be stripped, not merely of her honors, but of her comforts, and even of her necessary supports. She would be reduced to an indigent and suffering state, and made to realize her sin in the miseries which sin had entailed. But the crowning feature, at once, of her impiety and of her suffering, would exist in her unhumiliated, unyielding temper of mind. Between her condition and her spirit, there would be found no moral consonancy or agreement, not unlike to the state of those fallen angels who, though bound in chains, struggle nevertheless to the increase of their own unhappiness and in more impious rebellion—not accepting the wages of her sin, but combining her punishment with the ulcerations of the mind and heart. This we say, in any instance, is the crowning feature in the order of Divine retribution. For let a sinner's condition be ever so forlorn in itself, the mysterious operations of the Spirit can bring down into agreement with it all the

natural discordances and resistances of the mind and heart. Men of grace are quiet in their deepest humiliation, confiding in the hand which has laid them low, patient in tribulation, rejoicing in hope. There is a covenanted grace more than equivalent for all that may here depress or afflict the heart. But when a proud unyielding depravity on the part of man bends not to the stroke which falls from a parental hand, the sufferer thereby stirs up the tormenting worm which may never die, and the penal fire which may never be quenched. Now, on natural principles, it might have been supposed that where the Church, in defection from God, had arrived to this frightful pass, God in righteous displeasure would cast her off for ever. She has forsaken Him; justly might she herself be forsaken and left alone to eat the fruit of her own way. But our text inscribes on the sacred page the Divine method of recovering that which, on all other principles, were irrecoverably lost. Under former dispensations he had threatened—now, under the Gospel of his Son, he will persuade. He had called from the mount which burned with fire—now from Mount Zion, and from the heavenly Jerusalem, the persuasive appeals of Almighty God have succeeded to the notes of offended majesty. The text, therefore, may be considered as embodying the Gospel process of spiritual recovery, and in this view will afford, for present discourse, some invaluable suggestions. Observe how this record of the Divine purpose opens. “Therefore, behold!” implying something to be made known out of the line of man’s dealing with his fellow—a dispensation of loving-kindness, which is therefore termed by an Apostle, “the kindness of God our Saviour,”* now in full mani-

* Tit. iii. 4.

festation to ourselves. The principle involved in this benign conclusion of the Divine mind claims the special attention of Christian people.

Nothing is more common than to shape our determinations by reasons drawn not from a heart seasoned with grace, but from the perverseness, the inconsideration, the impiety of those with whom we have to do. Such persons are deficient in root, and, under incitements from without, fall away. They live at the mercy of those by whom they are surrounded. They draw their reasons of spirit and conduct from a forbidden source, and consequently from one unfriendly to their own peace. But it is a property of the true Christian to have root in himself—to draw his reasons, not from occasions without, but from the anointing of the Holy One which abideth in him. His spirit and conduct become the more luminous from the contrary temptations by which he is assailed. The prophet Isaiah has a parallel case, which equally shows, with the instance of the text, what is implied in “mercy rejoicing against judgment,” and how, from man’s inderset, Divine goodness but gathers a motive to its patient continuance. “For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners.”* Thus we may perceive, how in the midst of wrath God remembers mercy; suffers not His whole displeasure to arise; changes His course of dealing, and, through a divine Mediator, begins to persuade, where, on the ground of our demerit, he might justly have consumed.

* Isa. lvii. 17.

All those injunctions left by our Lord and his Apostles which relate to the Christian spirit and behavior, are but so many derivatives from the gracious economy which God himself has adopted toward men. Man is a frail being, and while his probation continues, no reasons of conduct towards him but those which sympathize in his recovery, should be drawn from his own depravity. Hence are we required to love our enemies,* to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us, that we may be the children of our Father which is in heaven—that we may be of one spirit with him. The grace of God, which through the Gospel of his Son bringeth salvation, teaches us to be patient and forbearing to the condition of fallen humanity. Our resentments are to be levelled at our own bosoms, and on account of our own impiety. In respect of those by whom we ourselves are assailed, a whole displeasure should be repressed. Our religion provokes not unto wrath, tempts not beyond the measure of a frail worm, perpetuates not a cold displeasure; but is ever kind and conciliatory, not being overcome of evil, but overcoming evil with good. The Divine purpose, as seen in our text and fulfilled in the Gospel of Christ, is itself a standing rebuke to a contrary temper. “For I will not contend for ever, saith the Lord God; neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.”†

Again. We may notice more particularly and with profit, the stage of the controversy, when the benign regimen indicated in our text is brought to bear on a

* Matt. v. 44.

† Isa. lvii. 16.

sinner's recovery. It might perhaps have been inferred, from the aggravated impiety of the Church, as depicted in our chapter, and the Omnipotence arrayed against her, that either her speedy reformation or her entire destruction must have ensued. But, in reality, the Gospel is brought to bear on sinners under circumstances when such clemency in their behalf might have been judged ill-timed, and likely to be perverted or abused. The Apostle, in the Epistle to the Romans, dwells on this remarkable feature of the Divine economy: "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."* And again: "But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."† So also it was when we were enemies, that the means of our recovery were brought to bear. Doubtless, this feature is liable to be perverted by some, and often has been. Some have turned this grace into a motive to continued licentiousness. The Apostle refers to these persons, who would seem to despise the riches of the Divine goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God was an appointed instrument of leading sinners to repentance. Such abusers of the Divine clemency are represented as treasuring up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, when God will render an award, measured not only with reference to the sins they have committed, but to grace they have neglected or despised. But our probationary period, while it lasts—and no man can define its limits—is allotted to means of recovery. God suffers not his whole displeasure to arise, lest the spirit of man should fail before him; but is long-suffering towards

* Rom. v. 6.

† Rom. v. 8.

us, not willing that any should perish, but that all, moved by his undeserved goodness, should come to repentance. When, through long and aggravated forgetfulness of God, a whirlwind of destruction might be looked for, behold a new and highly persuasive appeal enters the heart like a sunbeam, subdues impenitence, and returns the sinner to his God. "Therefore, behold! I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her."

The divine principle involved in this clemency, is also of much practical use and of Christian obligation. For whatever may be affirmed of a man's abstract rights, yet, as a social being, his rights have limitations assigned them; so that to become unmerciful in the prosecution of a right, is in a very important sense to become unjust. Man is not, at all times, in a condition to be thus rigorously dealt with. His Maker, who best knoweth whereof he is made, teaches us this, by remitting his own righteous claims, and by affixing bounds to his own displeasures, though under circumstances on our part of peculiar aggravation. Be assured, it is a merciful disposition, and not an abstract right, nor man's demerit, which gives the righteous rule and limitation of human displeasure. "Be ye merciful," said our Lord, "as your Father in heaven is merciful."* The same principle shows us, moreover, the true and acceptable ground on which collisions among men, otherwise interminable, may be happily closed. The peace concession is best made by him who, on natural ground, might be least expected to make it. As the Apostle expresses it, "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."† For the same reason that a man

* Luke vi. 36.

† Rom. xv. 1.

wilfully offends is he the less likely, because the less qualified, to make the peace concession. Wilful offence not merely blinds the eye, but distempers the heart. But these defects on the part of the offender best find their remedy in the nobility of him who is reasonably offended. The offender, as such, is impotent in the moral frame. He cannot turn and prepare himself for reconciliation, without a conciliatory spirit on the part of him whom he may have offended. That, therefore, which may be righteous in itself, becomes unequal as a requirement on him. This is always the case when the exaction exceeds the moral ability of him on whom it is made. He is yet without strength, and needs the goodness of his adversary as a restorative. This is the true principle of recovery. This will either lead an aggressor to repentance, or it will inconceivably aggravate his offence. Such goodness is not unlike to coals of fire, which will either dissolve his depravity, or harden his heart. It will prove either a savor of life unto life, or a savor of death unto death. This is what the Gospel is now doing in the world, and among ourselves. It is a burning coal on our heads, which the breath of the Spirit kindles, and one of its twofold effects must and will follow. It will either harden our hearts or dissolve our impenitence; it will either kill or make alive. It cannot return to its Author void; it must and will perform that whereunto it is appointed.

Let us now consider the means of spiritual recovery, as noted down by the Prophet. "Therefore, behold! I will allure her." "The Gospel," says Martin Luther, "is the true soothing speech with which the human mind is taken; for it terrifies not the soul, like the law, with severe denunciations of punishment; but although

it reproves sin, it declares that God is ready to pardon sinners for the sake of his Son, and holds forth the sacrifice of the Son of God, that the souls of sinners may be assured that satisfaction has thereby been made to God." This is an apt comment on the word "*allure*," as employed in our text. "No man cometh unto me," said our Lord, "except the Father which sent me draw him."* The Gospel is the true magnetism which pertains to our nature, under which the Holy Spirit captivates the soul and allures her into reconciliation with God. The peace advance is all on his side. The high reasons of mercy are all drawn from within himself. There is a grace, moreover, which goes before him, penetrates within the secret chambers of the heart, and predisposes an opening of the whole soul to the Divine allurements. In this way an innumerable multitude of sinners, who had long insulted the authority, contemned the mercy, and defied the power of their Maker, have been drawn into penitence and faith, never so truly confessing and lamenting their sins as when their guilt had obtained a free remission. The allurements of the charmer have entered the deepest recess of their souls, disarmed every hostile power, pulled down every strong hold, and rescued every faculty which sin had enthralled, from unhallowed domination. But Scripture and experience show, that alluring to the soul as is the Gospel of Grace, soothing as are its melodies, enchanting as are its appeals, yet the holy influence does not work irresistibly; there is a preparation of the heart which cometh from God, through some appointment of his grace, ordinarily required to give success to the persuasive voice of the Redeemer. The soul

* John vi. 44.

is to be made ready. A people are to be prepared for the Lord. The sickle is invited by a particular blush which the harvest assumes. In a word, a spiritual congruity between the persuasive power and the heart must be superinduced. Hence, in the process of spiritual recovery which our text records, prominence is given to the wilderness state into which the allured soul is brought. "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness." Figuratively, the wilderness denotes spiritual adversity and trouble. This is the state prefigured by that into which the Israel of God was introduced when allured out of Egypt, and we may add, the first fruits of the Gospel in its application to a sinner are hardly more than a series of spiritual adversities and troubles. His soul is brought down to the truth and reality of her state; she discerns her guilt and her danger, her disease, her poverty, and her destitution; she is brought under a sense of sole dependence on God, and prepared to estimate aright the things which, in the ministration of divine comfort, are freely given her of God. Look unto Israel in the wilderness. What is the ground of their consolation and support? Certainly not any thing in or of themselves, but rather the simple conviction of the truth—that God, who had allured them out of Egypt, after dividing the Red Sea, would not now leave nor forsake them. And it is so in every instance of spiritual recovery. Spiritual adversity is a standing feature of the Divine economy; it predisposes to hear the words of the charmer; it opens the soul to the Divine persuasions; it binds her faculties and powers to the Redeemer in an everlasting covenant. Strip the soul of her sense of inherent impoverishment, and you dissolve the tie which binds her to the Son of God, her Redeemer and friend. We need

not recite the Scriptures which bear on this feature of the Divine economy. Our Lord pronounces his own blessing on those who are sensibly affected under their spiritual adversity. The poor in spirit* are blessed. The hungry, the thirsty, the naked are blessed. Their Deliverer has brought them into a wilderness, that they might realize their dependence on himself: be comforted and blessed. Surely we should know the manner of spirit we ourselves are of. Have we been bowed down to the truth and reality of our state; or do we yet conceive ourselves to be rich and increased in goods, and to have need of nothing? "As for me," says David, "I am poor and needy; but the Lord careth for me."† Is the sense of our need warranted by the frequency and earnestness of our prayers—by our appreciation of the means of grace; of the time, also, and opportunities of religious improvement afforded us? Is it not a notable truth, that as our deliverance progresses, and the way opens before us, we sink into a lowlier frame, we hunger the more and we thirst the more? We pray without ceasing, and, too, with more importunity. He but needs the more who has the most. The furthest in advance makes the most speed. But it is affirmed by those who have been allured from the world, and brought under spiritual adversity and trouble, that God will speak comfortably unto them. The marginal reading has it, "I will speak to her heart," importing God's secret ways of allaying the disquietudes of the soul and of enriching her enjoyments; not that he takes her out of the wilderness, but by marked indications of his goodness he comforts and sustains her heart. We read how Israel, in the wilderness, was

* Matt. v. 3, &c.

† Ps. xl. 17.

thus cheered and upholden—and it is so now. God has access to the hearts of his people. They call upon Him in their adversity and trouble, and He delivereth them out of all their fears. They pray not, indeed, to be taken out of their discipline, but for a happy issue; while in it, they pray to be upheld—to be kept by the presence and power of God through faith unto salvation. And God speaks comfortably to their troubled hearts; He allays their discontents; He feeds their souls with the heavenly manna; “He bloweth with his wind, and the waters flow.” “O! Israel,” said David, “trust in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him plenteous redemption, and he shall redeem Israel from all his sins.”* But not merely comfort under trouble is assured, but many positive enjoyments of grateful refreshment to the soul. These are described in our text under the imagery of vineyards, and it is observable that these vineyards are to spring from her adversities and troubles. This is an interesting feature of the Divine dealings, in which spiritual adversity becomes the fruitful source of so many blessings. The sowing was in tears, but the reaping is in joy. The adversity was grievous, but the fruits were the peaceable fruits of righteousness. And this economy still continues as the peculiar inheritance of God’s people. They receive from God their vineyards through the medium of sanctified troubles. These are the vineyards which the Apostle acknowledged when he blessed the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who had blessed them with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Nor shall we wonder much at this Divine dispensation, when we remember that our

* Ps. cxxx. 7.

Divine Master received his vineyard as the fruit of his Cross. His Church is the refreshment of his soul, as it was once his travail, the purchase of his blood; and through much tribulation we ourselves must enter into the kingdom of God.

Finally, spiritual encouragement in our conflicts is divinely assured through the same medium. This is noted in our text under the figurative terms, "the Valley of Achor." This fruitful valley, we may remember, was the first conquest of Israel in the promised land. It was given to Israel as a door of hope—that is, an earnest of the entire conquest which awaited their good soldiery—and it wonderfully inspirited their subsequent battles. It is employed in our text figuratively, to denote those first fruits of the Spirit which minister so effectively to spiritual refreshment. Hence, it is added, "she shall sing there as in the days of her youth, when she came up out of the land of Egypt." The imagery employed denotes an invigorated state of the religious affections, under the influence of which, the soul is relieved of her weights and of her besetments, her way opened, and her progress cheered. And now, before concluding, let us inquire how far we may individually have participated in these promised blessings. Has God allured our hearts through the Gospel of his Son, drawn them from the enchantments of a vain fugitive world, lifted the veil from off our hearts, and laid open to our view the frauds of sin? Have we called unto the Lord out of the deep, saying, "Lord, hear my voice?" Has God, moreover, spoken to our hearts, and in comfortable words, saying, "Come unto me all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you?"* "So God loved the world, that he

* Matt. xi. 28.

gave his only begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* Have we received, moreover, spiritual blessings through the medium of our adversities and troubles? Has our measure of tribulation wrought patience in our spirits, and patience an experience of Divine faithfulness, and this experience hope in respect of the future? O! let us remember, this reasonable, religious, and holy hope maketh not ashamed—shall not be disappointed; but, to our endless joy, shall realize its happy longings, in earnest whereof the sense of Divine love is now shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. Do we obtain victories through our Lord Jesus Christ, and which open to us the door of hope? Are the ventures of our faith extending? Do we meditate new aggressions on the enemy, the demolition of strongholds, the accession of new trophies to the Cross of our Redeemer? Do we sing the Lord’s song under the adversities and troubles of life, whensoever they oppress us—sympathizing with the holy and humble men of heart who had trodden these paths, have now finished their course, and entered upon their rest? If so, then the gracious promise in our text is thus far fulfilled in us. We have experienced of God’s faithfulness, are privileged to rejoice in hope, and to anticipate the period when the wilderness shall be succeeded by the heavenly country, and its burning sands by the golden streets.

* John iii. 15.

SERMON XLVI.

SYMPATHY PERFECTED BY SUFFERING.

“Who is weak, and I am not weak?”—2 Cor. xi. 29.

THIS impressive appeal by St. Paul to the judgment and conscience of the Corinthian Church, follows immediately the recital of his numerous and multiform tribulations. He was familiar with every variety of bodily suffering and of mental disquietude; had been maltreated at home and abroad, by his own countrymen, the Jews, and by strangers, the Gentiles; had encountered many adverse Providential visitations; was often pinched, as it were, by iron fingers; was acquainted with human infirmity under the sorrows, the griefs, the perplexities incident to all, and within the bitter experience of many. As Divine Providence in its wisdom had diversified the sources of his painful trials, so Divine Grace had enriched his mind with its peculiar consolations. He had never been left to the unmitigated severity of tribulation. He had become fully conscious, indeed, of his own weakness under these trials. He had felt the power of temptation; but under all, and amidst all, he had known the grace of his Redeemer, was intimately acquainted with its suggestions, its helps, its supports, its joys. Under every trial, under every perplexity, under every temptation, a way had been opened for his escape. This way, he was well assured, was not in himself, nor of himself. It was a door of escape, which an invisible hand had opened before him, and which no man could shut; over which was inscribed, in language which the world could not

interpret, and which faith alone can receive, "This is the way; walk ye in it." His own experience of human misery, as well as of Divine consolation and deliverance, had both established his confidence in God, and eminently qualified him to minister profitably unto others. This appears to be the import of the passage before us: "Who is weak, and I am not weak?" implying his being both able and willing, through his own experience, to sympathize with others in their sufferings, either of body or of mind. He had within himself a key to every man's feelings and infirmities. He knew the deep-seated necessities of human nature, and he knew how to meet these necessities in the spirit of Christian charity and condolence, and out of the abundant stores of consolation, wherewith he himself had been comforted of God.

Indeed the Apostle himself, in the first chapter of our Epistle, gives this exposition of the passage before us: "Blessed be God," says he, "even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble, by the comfort we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation, also, aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation." Such, we believe, to be a full and authorized exposition of the appeal in our text; and it conveys some deeply interesting thought. It reveals the

twofold end of all those tribulations, whether spiritual or temporal in their nature, which cross our path and depress the heart as we journey through life. Our own personal salvation is the primary end in view. We are born to a sinful inheritance, and to painful trial, by laws as fixed and certain as are those under which the sparks fly upward. If the morning of life open felicitously upon us, and our bosoms expand under the illimitable prospect of earthly beatitude, and we rejoice in our youth, and our hearts cheer us in the days of our youth, and we glide forward into life smoothly and evenly—all these pleasant ways of heedless youth, it would seem, have served only in the end to awaken more wrathfully the sleeping bolt of Divine retribution. Then the worm, the grief, the canker are ours alone. What in this way we have witnessed in the case of other men, befalls ourselves. We fare as others have fared. Happier than they, only if we humble ourselves more under the mighty hand of God, and kiss, with deeper sentiments of grateful affection, the rod which has torn and agonized our bosoms; more favored than they only, if under our afflictions our lot has been cast among Christian people, who themselves having suffered, can aid our infirmities with their sympathy, and with the abundant consolations wherewith themselves have been comforted of God. “Who is weak, and I am not weak?” Look, too, at the painful bereavements which so many have encountered in the loss of objects of closest sympathy and affection. What a record of agonized feeling among the living may we not gaze upon among the tombs! Here lies the head torn from the family body. Here lie precious members severed from the body. Here repose the breathless forms of those on whom maternal affection had

once gazed with a smile of interest; and here are deposited the placid remains of her whose spirit, consecrated by suffering, had winged its flight, commending to God's protection and care what to God alone she could confidingly commit.

We turn from these cold remembrances of the dead, and from inscriptions graven by art and man's device; but our imagination may read other inscriptions, more deeply and more imperishably cut in the hearts of the bereaved. We turn from the dead to the disconsolate survivors; to wounded spirits which had refused to be comforted; to hearts torn and bleeding; to affection which would not, could not be weaned—which went down into the grave mourning. “Who is weak, and I am not weak?” Look, too, at that broad, that extended scope of suffering which has sprung from reckless defamation of character. What corroding carefulness, what sleepless anxiety, has not often grown from the vile breath of slanderous imputation. As though our fallen inheritance were not in itself sufficiently charged with the materials of anguish, we encounter innumerable occasions of painful depression, from the blindness, the stupidity, the corrupt misdirection of thought, and all uncharitableness of those around us. It is vain to complain of these things. In addition to the painful trial and gloomfulness which result from our actual sins, we have inherited a liability to be troubled by the sins of others. The vindication of thousands, who from this source have suffered keenly, but patiently and uncomplainingly, sparing the reputation of their defamers at their own expense, will appear only in the judgment of the great day, and before that universal assemblage of the Church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven. It is a fea-

ture in the sufferings of Christ, and the servant is not greater than his Lord. While the world endures, there will be found a numerous class, who, with the wrong handle of things they have grasped, will draw upon a polluted imagination for their facts. These, as facts, will be whispered around, and under some imposing but false pretence will be whispered again. No ties however tender, no official dignity, no sanctity however inviolate, will shield a man against this depravity. In addition to the burden of his own sins, he is doomed to bend in sorrow under the wickedness which vile breath only has heaped upon him. "Who is weak, and I am not weak?"

In addition to these sources of trouble we encounter others, in the difficulties which attend and often obstruct our entrance on a religious course of life. Strait is the gate, said our Lord. The Apostle's own experience was of this kind. What things were gain to him were now to be accounted as loss. All his instinctive feelings were to undergo a revulsion. All the prejudices of his education were to be subverted. All his associations were to be renounced. It would seem that Providence had given an impetuosity to his temperament but to arrest him the more suddenly and violently in the midst of his career. We ourselves can hardly enter into the feelings and conflicts which, under his awakening, agitated and convulsed his frame. To the Jews he himself, and after his conversion, could become a Jew. He could persuade an awakened Jew, for he knew his perplexity. He knew how to console this man, for he knew his agony. But we have no key of access in our own experience to these convulsed throes of an agonized heart. But from the ordinary difficulties which now attend a sinner's entrance on a truly re-

ligious life, and of which we ourselves may have more or less experience, we may form some idea of the increase of difficulty, when at the gate some boasted inheritance or hard-earned possession was to find its confiscation; when reputation with the learned, and wise, and great, and powerful, so long and zealously prosecuted, was to be sunk; when connection with the friends of one's youth was to be dissolved; when the most interesting ties of nature and affinity were to be cut; when all the engaging attributes of life were to be endangered, and life itself held by a tenure so precarious that the Christian convert might with truth be said to have "died daily." "Who is weak, and I am not weak?" But though the progress and establishment of truth have smitten down these terrors at the gate, and left the way of life comparatively open, yet we still possess difficulties within our nature, in relation to this entrance, sufficiently formidable and perplexing to justify the descriptive terms of that gate which our Lord has given. It is "a strait gate," which no man will truly enter until God's persuasive voice has reached his heart, and influenced his determinations. And what Christian is not prepared to sympathize with the awakened man in his secret conflicts and agonies, at the entrance of life, and in his felt insufficiency to achieve his heart's desire? We speak not now of the nominal Christian; of one who is indebted for his admission only to the faith of his parents, and to his education, for the little influence which religion has over him, and of which nevertheless he is ashamed. But we speak of the Christian who has striven to enter, and found himself unable; who has agonized at the gate; who at length has betaken himself to the grace of his Redeemer, and found in him only that power which was suffi-

cient for him. Ah! says that Christian, "Who is weak, and I am not weak?" Who can find at the gate what has not already tried my own spirit, and driven me to the Saviour for help?

There are other sources of painful trial, of which our limits forbid the notice. But one remark will apply to all manner of trouble. It is intended as an instrument of saving mercy to our own souls. We say, *an instrument*, for trouble, from whatever source, has within itself no saving efficacy. On the contrary, in itself, it *may*, and doubtless often has, become a savor of death unto death. So far from having instrumentally wrought a qualification within the sufferer to sympathize with others, it has closed his heart against them, if indeed it has not stirred up a secret exultation in the overthrow which has allied their condition to his own. When the king of Babylon fell, the princes of the nations, who themselves had fallen, are represented as exulting over his troubles. "Art thou become weak as we?" say they. "Art thou become like unto us?"* And this sentiment may have more predominance within our own bosoms than we at first might suspect, or be willing in any degree to admit. Certain it is, that without God's preventing grace, all our troubles must tend this way. But it has pleased God, in the general arrangements of his grace, that trouble should become a chosen instrument in effecting a sinner's conversion; and he has so wisely ordered, that under this gracious result we become ourselves very effective instruments in God's hands of administering consolation to others. This is the secondary end of all our troubles, "that we may be able every way to com-

* Is. xiv. 10.

fort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." This is not merely the secondary end of our troubles, but it is the only evidence on which we can safely rely, that our own sufferings in any form, whether in reverse of temporal condition, or in bereavement, or under our own miscarriage, or under unjust imputations affecting our worldly reputation, or in the beginning or progress of our religious course, have been sanctified and made available to our own salvation. The prevailing sentiment of the Christian sufferer is expressed in our text: "Who is weak, and I am not weak?" which implies not merely an experience of trouble, and of Divine consolation and help under that trouble, but also a readiness to minister to others that consolation we have ourselves received. Now this secondary end in *our* sufferings was the primary moral end in our Redeemer's sufferings; for "it behoved him in all things," says the Apostle, "to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God—to make reconciliation for the sins of the people; for in that he himself suffered—being tempted—he is able to succor them that are tempted."* "We have not a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."† The expression "yet without sin," imports that it was not for the correction of any thing amiss in him that He was tried with divers afflictions, *but* that, in the actual experience of our troubles, He might the more effectually sympathize in our infirmities and comfort our souls. In this sense He

* Heb. ii. 18.

† Heb. iv. 15.

is said to have been perfected for His office. His, now, in an eminent degree, is the sentiment in our text: "Who is weak, and I am not weak?" The conclusion from this view of our subject would seem to be obvious. Under all our troubles, and from whatever source, we need be found "looking unto Jesus"* for sanctification. We need be found seeking the grace of our Redeemer, under the lively conviction that He is able to succor them that are tried. We need seek this grace through its appointed channels, both in evidence of our sincerity and of our humility—relinquishing all our own vain conceits—turning from the suggestions of pride, and casting our souls on the Redeemer, in the simplicity of unfeigned trust, and of lowly obedience to His word. Be assured, wherein we are weak, He, for our sakes, became weak, that we, through His weakness, might receive abundant consolation. He holds within His hand a key of access to all the secret chambers of our hearts, and is perfectly familiar with all our susceptibilities of sorrow and anguish. But we must not cease to remember, that all divine consolation we ourselves receive, is for distribution. Freely we have received—freely let us give. Our own necessities will be best met as we meet the necessities of others. If we need consolation in a given way, let us minister to others in that way wherein we ourselves have been comforted of God. There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and the more abundant the sympathy which warms our hearts, and the consolations we dispense, the richer and the more enduring will become the exceeding treasures of grace within our own souls.

* Heb. xii. 2.

SERMON XLVII.

THE PENITENCE OF MANASSEH.

“Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.”—2 Chron. xxxiii. 13.

THE religion which saves the soul is matter of personal experience. At first we hear of God and of ourselves by the hearing of the ear, but afterwards we become more intimately acquainted with the Divine character and with our own. In securing to us these spiritual advantages, affliction is often an appointed instrumentality. It was so with Job. It was so with Manasseh. Of this latter person it is affirmed, that when he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and the same record assures us that God was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. It is added in our text, “then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.” He had a lively and operative impression of the Divine goodness and mercy—an impression under which he became a witness of God against himself, justified his Maker in all His doings, and humbled himself greatly before Him. As a man positively affirms to those statements only of the truth of which he has personal knowledge, so actual experience only qualifies a man, as St. John expresses it, to “set to his seal that God is true.” In this view the history of Manasseh is singularly instructive. It shows the insufficiency of mere educational religion to create a right spirit within us, and the all-sufficiency of Divine Grace for this purpose. In the history of Manasseh

there are four points of prominence to which we may profitably advert:—the circumstances of his youth, his character as an apostate, his return as a penitent, and lastly, his salvation as a believer. First, the circumstances of his youth. These were in the highest degree favorable to moral culture. His father, King Hezekiah, was eminent for his piety. Previously to the birth of his son, he had effected, under God, a signal reformation of the Church. He purged the nation from a species of heathenism into which the true religion had degenerated, removed every stumbling-block which occasioned the people to sin, and did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. The testimony of Scripture is, that “Hezekiah trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him; for he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses. And the Lord was with him, and he prospered whithersoever he went forth.”* But the character of Manasseh as an apostate will next show that outward state or condition, however auspicious, yet without the Divine blessing, are wholly insufficient to counterwork the deep depravity of the human heart. We look for grapes, but often the vine on which all our toil has been expended bringeth forth wild grapes. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.”†

The same Providence which elevated Manasseh to the throne, permitted him to sink down into a depth of apostacy which obscured in its own darkness all other shades. “The chief of sinners” was the motto

* 2 Kings xviii. 5, 6, 7.

† Zech. iv. 6.

inscribed on his forehead. Religious declension is common in some form or other to the best of men. Even his father, on a memorable occasion, was chargeable with the most flagrant ingratitude. But it had happened to Manasseh to carry out his apostacy to an extent but rarely equalled in the darkest annals of guilt, certainly never surpassed. In the records of Manasseh it would seem to be the Divine purpose, to furnish the Church with evidence, both of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and of the richness and sovereignty of Divine Grace. In the substance and form of Manasseh's apostacy sin had exhausted its malignancy. His career was vile and opprobrious. Every vice had affixed its seal to his character, to designate to the world a monster. Our chapter gives the detail of his enormities. In every step of his career we may discover not merely a recklessness to his father's precept and example, but an inveterate hostility to every monition from this source. Every moral and religious restraint was unhinged. He sallied forth like some unbridled demon, darker than the midnight hour, abandoning himself to all ungodliness. But there are lessons of piety which, once learned, can never be unlearned. Divine light within the breast may be effectually resisted and overborne, but it cannot be extinguished. Manasseh, as far as it was possible, had disengaged his course from every religious restraint; but at the root of all his licentiousness and impiety, as the sequel shows, there lived a corroding worm which embittered his peace, and turned his cup of pleasure into wormwood and gall. These stings of remorse served but to exasperate his resentments. This is their common effect on an unconverted mind. He now conceived the impious purpose of exterminating the religion in which he had been reared,

and of setting up a false religion, under cover of which his spirit might escape those torturous inflictions which give no peace to the wicked. The Lord's house was speedily converted into an idol's temple; the worship of Baalim was proclaimed; impious rites were instituted, and their celebration sanctioned by his example, his patronage, his command. Remonstrance was punished, and resistance met with the sword. In reply to their solemn protests, the holy Prophets were sawn asunder, while the streets of Jerusalem were made slippery with consecrated blood. Such was the depth of Manasseh's apostacy! By reason of his enormities, and of the impunity with which they were long continued, doubtless the faith of many in the reality of Divine government was made to totter. They looked for some speedy execution of the righteous judgment of God, and wondered at the delay of the chariot-wheels which were to bear against him the ministers of wrath. But God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, neither are His ways as our ways. The power which God now delights to put forth is evidenced, not in the destruction, but in the conversion of sinners. This power is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that even the chief of sinners should perish. This is the power which has surrounded itself with innumerable trophies, among which we recount with wonder the intolerant, the cruel, the bloody, the impious Manasseh. Let us consider him as a penitent. The period of his repentance is noticed by the sacred historian: it was when he was in affliction. It appears that the Assyrian monarch made a descent on Judah, took captive Manasseh, and carried him in triumph to Babylon. Here, immured in a dark and loathsome dungeon, and in chains, the early religious impressions he had received began to work

as so much leaven hidden in a lump. The Divine light which he could not extinguish began to shine with effect. Who but Manasseh himself can depict the mental anguish which he here endured? "Solitary imprisonment," says an eminent writer, "is a fearful doom. The physical privations of the criminal are the least of his sufferings. His very uncontrollable mind, under its constrained idleness, pours out and diffuses through the whole interior man unmingled bitterness. His imagination scared, soon peoples his narrow cell with images of horror. His waking hours are as dream-like as those of deep midnight, for the incubus of a guilty conscience sits heavy on his breast, and he is either maddened by its horrors or familiarized to its reproaches." Such, doubtless, were the circumstances of Manasseh, when from her storehouse Memory poured into his soul the materials of insufferable anguish. O! how he must have writhed under the scorpion stings of remorse as the recollections of early life opened upon his vision! The piety of his illustrious sire; the moral beauty which it had been the labor of his father's life to diffuse over Judah; the goodness of God which had surrounded his youth with priceless privileges; the perversion of all these privileges; the contemptuous neglect or ungodly profanation of all that was sacred; the prophetic lights in the world which, with an unrelenting hand, he had madly extinguished—among them the burning lamp of Isaiah; the misery which he had entailed upon thousands whose happiness, as king, he was bound to promote; the fraud, moreover, the injustice, the cruelty, the oppression which he had perpetrated; the moral desolation which he had spread over the nation; the waste howling wilderness to which he had reduced the kingdom once committed to his hands,

in all its revived beauty and fruitfulness. There was, moreover, in his present circumstances, nothing to alleviate the misery he endured. In respect of the future, all hope must have fled. At the present, he must have keenly felt his own personal degradation. From the past his whole soul must have instinctively recoiled. Miserable, undone sinner! how could he have borne, and yet how could he have escaped the thought of a righteous God, enthroned in judgment and armed for vengeance? Had the mind of Manasseh been less fortified by early-instilled religious principles, we can readily conceive the false refuge to which, under these complicated miseries from within and from without, he would have had recourse. "A wounded spirit who can bear."* Let another world, and the awful issues there to be unfolded, be what they may, except God interpose, this world becomes insufferable to a sinner, and cannot, will not be endured. "Either reason sinks beneath the tortures, or else the dark powers which lie in wait for the tempted, gather around the wretched victim and make him their own for ever."

But the value of early religious culture in the case of Manasseh, now became apparent. Amidst all the torturous pangs which guilt could inflict, there were a thousand sacred associations, which, like so many cords, now began to humble his lofty spirit, and to draw out his soul in penitence towards God. As the Record expresses it, "he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his Fathers, and prayed unto him." And if the prayer ascribed to him on this occasion, and admitted as such among the Apocryphal Scriptures, be in reality the effusion of

* Prov. xviii. 14.

his spirit, we shall not only be struck with the humility and accuracy of the sentiments it comprehends, but wonder how a man could ever combine such sentiments with so profligate a career. Strange, indeed, is the fact, that a man may be so perfectly accomplished in Scripture sentiment, and yet remain so long a stranger to its converting power! It seems, then, that the two distinguishing properties of Manasseh's repentance were unfeigned humility and fervent prayerfulness. While he prayed fervently, and loathed himself for all his abominations, he, with implicit faith, cast his soul on God for protection. We proceed lastly, to consider his salvation as a believer. The Record informs us, that God was entreated of him. Whatever the course of Manasseh may have been, the spirit he now evinced approved itself to God. "The sacrifices of God are a troubled spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."* From the period of his unfeigned humiliation, his mind received comfort, and in due time, God delivered him out of the hand of the Assyrian, returned him to Jerusalem, and reinstated him on the throne. And now the reality of Manasseh's penitence and faith began to be evidenced by much precious fruit. The eminent station he filled was consecrated to God, and to the happiness of his people. In this commendable walk he continued through the residue of his days, and was finally gathered unto his fathers in peace.

Behold the triumph of redeeming grace, the signal trophy of a Saviour's love and compassion. Where sin has abounded, how much more has not grace abounded.

* Ps. li. 17.

To you, my young friends, it cannot but furnish an example of warning. You see, in the history of Manasseh, to what depths in impiety that youth may sink, who, flattered under the seductive allurements of vice, casts off the restraints which early religious training has imposed. You see illustrated, moreover, an important truth, that when men surrender themselves to the gratification of a licentious course of life, it becomes with them matter of moment, not only that the restraints of religion should be cast off, but that religion itself should be disparaged, and its authority clouded to the mind. It is the *fool*, that is, the man who pursues wrong ends by wrong means, whom David represents as saying in his heart, "there is no God," and consequently, no moral government, no tribunal, no arraignment, no condemnation, no punishment. But O! how vain and self-deceptive are not all these thoughts. They spring from a deceived heart, which leads men astray, and the blast of the trump of God, if not the furnace of affliction, will dissipate the illusion for ever. Sacredly regard, then, example of pious parents and friends. Lay up for yourselves stores of religious knowledge. Improve every opportunity to season your heart with Divine instruction. Though this may not be attended with immediate effect, yet in the history before us, you see its value in the end.

The history of Manasseh affords, also, an encouraging example to sinners, to repent and be converted, that their sins may be blotted out before they go hence, and are no more seen. Nothing is more common under first awakenings, and especially in cases where early instruction has been despised, than for sinners to conclude that all the Divine provisions of mercy are against them. They see in God an enemy, and are

disposed, rather to flee from His presence, than to be attracted by His calls. "There is no hope," said some of this class, described by the Prophet Jeremiah, "but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart."* Such persons have not studied the history of Manasseh, nor considered the Divine character, as illustrated in its sequel. How that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. He is ever ready to receive sinners truly repenting, and turning unto him by faith. If desponding sentiments might, in any instance, have justly been entertained, they might so have been entertained by the son of Hezekiah. But notice the conduct of Manasseh, when, under the pinch of affliction, he came to himself. Read the prayer which breathed his sentiments of humiliation, and of confidence in God. "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."†

Finally—the history affords an example of general instruction. We here learn that a course of irreligion and folly can find no approval in our own judgment; but is contrary to the Divine light that shines within us. Every step in apostacy taken by Manasseh, was opposed by the light within him. He needed no man to condemn him. He was condemned by the verdict of his own reason and conscience. At every leap into iniquity, he was smitten by the flashing luminary within his own breast. And, beloved friends, it is thus with every sinner, and especially under the true light which now shineth. Amidst all the vain reasonings under which the hearts of men are deceived, there is a witness within—a witness against the sinner whose mouth cannot be stopped. There is a light within him

*Jer. xviii. 12.

† John vi. 37.

which no ingenuity of his can extinguish. In the mean time, God is gracious and merciful—slow to anger, and of great kindness—not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He persuades men by His ministry, by His Spirit, by His providence; and when His goodness has overpowered their rebellion, and led them to repentance, He pardons all their sins, washes out the crimson dye, accepts their persons in the Beloved, comforts their hearts, delivers them out of the power of their enemies, and reinstates them in Divine approbation and favor. O! the abundant goodness of God our Saviour. Let the opposition of every sinner fall before it. Let his humiliation be manifest; let his prayers unceasingly ascend; let his confidence in God be unfaltering. So will God be entreated by sinners, and hear their supplications, and restore them to his favor, and comfort their hearts with the overflowings of his pity and love.



SERMON XLVIII.

HEZEKIAH.

“O Lord, in these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit.”—Isa. xxxviii. 16.

THESE words occur in the grateful song of King Hezekiah, on his happy deliverance from deep and complicated affliction. Among the earlier achievements of his administration, he had both reformed the Church and redeemed the State—the one from heathenish mixtures, the other from the Assyrian yoke, which Ahaz,

his father, had wickedly assumed. It was now with Sennacherib, the Assyrian monarch, the darling wish of his heart, to recover this tributary portion of his realm. In prosecuting his purpose, he had invaded Judea with an overwhelming force, and in proud confidence of success. In the mean time, Hezekiah, disappointed of expected aid from the kings of Ethiopia and Egypt, sues for peace. Sennacherib assents to terms; but as a condition of leaving the country, he demands a full indemnity for the past. Hezekiah has no alternative but to comply. The indemnity is paid over, amounting to a sum which had drained the kingdom, and even stripped the temple of its gold. No sooner had the indemnity been secured, than the faithless Assyrian commenced an indiscriminate ravage in his approach to the capital. Jerusalem was then the grand depot of stores and munitions of war. The surrender of this, also, was demanded as security for the future. At this juncture, Hezekiah was attacked by an acute disease, which entirely incapacitated him for action, and even threatened his life. Indeed, he receives, through the Prophet Isaiah, a message of death. It is difficult to conceive of severer trials, than those which now depressed the mind and heart of this good man. Disappointed of his expected allies; the outskirts of the kingdom laid waste by an exasperated foe, whose yoke he had once shaken off; the nation humbled into a suit for peace; exorbitant demands submitted unto without avail; Jerusalem now invested by an overpowering force; its surrender demanded in terms vaunting and impious; and, to fill the measure of his trial, his person is assailed by an acute disease, and himself cast upon a bed, with a message of death vibrating on his ear; hopeless in the issue, yet unwilling to die—ordered to

prepare for death, yet, on various urgencies, both of a public and private nature, most solicitous to live. The spectacle of a good man, under these severities of trial, is at all times singularly instructive and affecting. In one view we see the earthly and the unearthly man—the infirmities of our nature, combined with that holy trust in God which is the life-blood and stay of the soul. It is said, Hezekiah wept sore, for his grief was bitter; but it is said, also, he turned his face toward the wall, looking toward the temple, and prayed unto the Lord, preferring his humble plea of conscious integrity toward God: “Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.”* A good man, though he disclaim all merit or deserving either in what he is, or in what he has done, yet, considered as an evidence to himself of Divine grace and mercy, his conscious integrity is a source of consolation, and of holy confidence, in his approach unto God. Hopeless as often appears a good man’s case, and hopeless as it may truly be in respect of all ordinary means of deliverance, it assumes a new complexion to the eye of faith, as seen under the absolute disposal of Almighty God. The Prophet was again sent to Hezekiah, with a message of life: “Go and say to Hezekiah, thus saith the Lord, the God of David, thy father: I have heard thy prayer—I have seen thy tears: behold I will add unto thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver thee, and this city, out of the hand of the King of Assyria: and I will defend this city.” In addition to this assurance, a supernatural sign is afforded Hezekiah, for the confirmation of his faith, and

* Is. xxxviii. 3.

the more immediate solace of his heart. We all know the result, as recorded in different Books of the Old Testament. What was the immediate instrument of destruction God employed, we are not informed, but on that night the angel of death was sent within the Assyrian army, and commissioned to do his work. Sennacherib himself escaped, but to fall by the hands of his own sons, who aspired to his throne. How soon were not the circumstances of Hezekiah changed from the lowest depths of woe, to the fulness of consolation and joy? Behold! the wicked have ceased to trouble him—his soul is at rest. Presently, his health is restored; nor are we without an intimation, elsewhere afforded, that the massy treasures, so iniquitously extorted by Sennacherib, were all recovered to his profession. It would seem that God had but cast down this righteous man, in order to raise him up, and to warm his heart with new and livelier testimonies, that the Lord, in whom his soul confided, was infinitely worthy of his trust.

The first engagement of Hezekiah, on realizing his own deliverance, was to embody in a song of thanksgiving, and to transmit to posterity, a record of the workings of his own heart, under this eventful period of his history. It comprehends the tenure of his thoughts in every turn of his trial, and suggests reflections which may touch the chord of sympathy in many a bosom, and be followed out with profit and delight. Among these is that just, and, in this world of uncertainty, most consoling reflection in our text, that although God ordinarily employs natural means in prosecuting his wise and gracious ends, yet he is not in such wise dependent on these means, as that, in their absence, his purpose must, of necessity, fail. He him-

self is superior to, and independent of, all visible instrumentalities, and, if need be, can work effectually without them, as He often does. "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit." Let us consider, then, the things here referred to, with their just claims to our own faith and confidence. The train of Hezekiah's thought, on the recovery of his health, and the resuscitation of his hopes, was not merely grateful, but penitential. It had led him to reflect on the instability and uncertainty of all natural grounds of trust, considered simply in themselves, and irrespectively of God. He himself, perhaps, had relied too sanguinely on the expected aid and support of the Kings of Ethiopia and Egypt against the common enemy. But at the very juncture, when their cavalry would have been eminently serviceable, his expectations from this source had utterly failed. The help of man, therefore, or the favor of princes, though God may employ these things, and often does, as instruments in effecting His purposes of mercy, are not, in themselves, the things of which it can truly be affirmed, that by them men live, or in which is the life of their spirit. And this truth should be meekly received by us, and grafted into our hearts as a vital principle, and allowed to moderate that vain trust, which, in the forgetfulness of God, is so often reposed in men of high degree. It is reasonable, indeed, that such men should be deeply impressed with a sense of accountability to God, and use to the utmost the means of influence at their control. Still it may please God to dispense with their instrumentality—to employ feebler instruments, or to reserve the case to His own special action. But, if we lose sight of the vital principle involved in the text, put our confidence in man, as man, or in princes, as princes,

depart from the Lord, or become unmindful of his word, our hope, though it flourish for awhile, and flatter unbelief, will ultimately perish. That which we sowed in vain confidence, shall be reaped in disappointment and vexation. It is better, we read, to trust in the Lord, than to put any confidence in man: it is better to trust in the Lord, than to put any confidence in princes.* We are exhorted, in this view, “to cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils;”† to put our trust in the Lord, and to be doing good, with a promise annexed; to delight ourselves in the Lord; to commit our way unto the Lord, and to put our trust in Him. His own purposes of mercy, His word, His promises in Christ Jesus our Lord, his gracious dealings with poor, sinful, but humble and confiding man—these are the things by which men live, and in all these things is the life of their spirit.

Again: What has been said of unsanctified trust in men of high degree, will equally apply to a like trust in riches. The natural tendency of riches is to beget in the hearts of those who possess them a vain confidence, often as irrespective of God as though riches were the things by which men live, and in which they had the life of their spirit. But a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. We have reason to believe, that the mind and heart of Hezekiah were not a little tainted with this species of vain confidence. We know he subsequently displayed his riches before the Babylonish Embassy, and from that moment the Prophet Isaiah predicted the memorable captivity, and the transfer of all these riches into the treasury of Babylon. “Riches,” we are

* Ps. cxviii. 8-9.

† Is. ii. 22.

told, "profit not in the day of wrath;"* and yet when they increase, how prone are not men to set their hearts upon them. Now, riches, when rightfully acquired, are not to be despised. They are an ordinary instrument of God, in not only advancing the comfort of their possessor, but of enlarging the sphere of his usefulness. Solomon says: "Riches are a crown unto the wise."† They are a good makeweight when subordinated to the fear of God. But when, in our forgetfulness of God, they become the matter of vain confidence; when we begin "to trust in these uncertain riches;"‡ when we lose sight of God's sovereignty; when we begin to idolize our riches; cherish an unhalloved warmth and complacency in them; rely on them as means of support in a bad cause, or of defence in a false position; in a word, when we begin to regard them as "the things by which men live, and in which is the life of their spirit"—then we may rest assured that one of three issues is within our allotment. Either we shall seasonably repent of this, our wickedness, and turn unto the Lord, by whom alone we live, and in whom alone is the life of our spirit, her sure refuge and defence; or in our soul's behalf, our riches shall soon take to themselves wings, and fly away; or, if permitted to be retained, they, under such perversion, will most surely exclude us from the Kingdom of God. We are all familiar with the Scriptures which relate to this matter. Simon Magus cherished within his heart the thought, that even the gift of God might be purchased with money. And under various guises, this species of impiety still lingers within the world. We lift up our hearts unto money, when we should have

* Prov. xi. 4.

† Prov. xiv. 24.

‡ 1 Timo. vi. 17.

lifted them up unto the Lord. The love of one has superseded, if not entirely eradicated, the love of the other. But how solemn is the rebuke which inspiration ministers to every form and modification of this wickedness. "Thy money perish with thee; because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God."*

Shall we wonder that the gold of Hezekiah, by the hand of God and through the fraud of his enemy, should be taken away—as a hindrance—an insuperable obstruction between himself and a happy deliverance? Nor let it be imagined for a moment that the evil implied in this false confidence in riches is peculiar to those who may possess them. It is largely shared in by those who, being providentially denied them, nevertheless covet possession with an inordinancy of affection and recklessness of adventure which admit of no palliation or excuse. A man whom Providence may have intrusted with riches, if he fall into temptation and a snare which is likely to drown his soul, may have, in his weakness, at least a shadow of excuse. If he be a sincere—but feeble-minded servant of God—God will make a way for his escape. In the course of events he will change his posture, and make it less unfriendly to his soul. When we pray "to be delivered from evil," we thereby commit all our way unto God, to be changed, broken up, remodeled, or established in such wise, as in the wisdom and goodness of God will best consist, either with our usefulness in this world, or with our happiness in the world to

* Acts viii. 20.

come. And it is the consolation of men devoted to God, most earnestly to believe, that God will do this in their own behalf; that He will cast them down to prepare them to be lifted up. We may very readily conceive how a man's confidence in God may be fully sustained through all the changing scenes of life, whether seemingly prosperous or adverse: for he has this Divine assurance, that if a lover of God, "all things shall work together for his good."* But what are we to think of men who covet a condition or circumstance of life, which God in his providence has withheld from them; men whose life is but little more than the craving of unsatiated desire; who lust and have not; who kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain; whose heart aspiration it is, to be borne up by any means beyond their appointed sphere. The curse entailed upon the covetous is, that without the possession of riches they inherit their evil and their danger. The moral result is the same; whether we pervert what we possess, or covet that which we have not, that we may consume it upon our lusts. It is affirmed of some who coveted after money, "that they had erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."† "But thou, O man of God," adds the Apostle, "flee these things," both the false confidence which gold inspires and a hankering desire after it, "and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." These—these are the things by which men live, and in which is the life of their spirit.

Again: What has been said of unsanctified trust in men of high degree, or in riches, will equally apply to such trust in our good health. If we recur to our nar-

* Rom. viii. 28.

† 1 Tim. vi. 10.

rative, we shall perceive how the mind of Hezekiah, however imperceptibly to himself, had become tinctured with this vain confidence. When he looked over the kingdom, and contemplated what had been achieved in behalf of Church and State, what was still in progress, and what remained to be accomplished; the fact, moreover, that he was yet childless, and that without a well-trained successor to the throne all that he had done would gradually decay—the people relax into heathenism, and again fall under the yoke of some galling oppression—the perpetuity of his own health and vigor assumed, within his own estimation, a measure of importance as fallacious in itself as it was derogatory to God. What, then, must have been the revulsion within his feelings, when, at the very crisis in which the people most needed his presence in repelling an ambitious idolater, he was forced to his bed by an ulcerous disease, and ordered to prepare for death. O! he could not consent to die at this juncture. His confinement alone was a burden too heavy for him to bear. What was to become of the Church, and what was to become of the State? What was to become of his own name, and of the fulfilment of all those good words of God which he had been accustomed to appropriate to his own joy and peace in believing? “I had great bitterness,” says Hezekiah. At one glance he saw the subversion of a thousand associations endeared to his heart. In the course of our ministry we have witnessed displays of this bitterness, arising from the peculiar circumstances of men under the message of death. A glance at their worldly affairs—at the assembled group around their beds—at their own unfriendly relation, perhaps, to the eternal world—seemed to produce an insupportable skinking of soul from impending disso-

lution. O! how hard, then, to be still, and to know and to feel that the Lord is God.* Hezekiah turned his languid eye in the direction of the Temple, and sought the relief of his bosom in preferring to God his earnest plea, mingled with great weeping.

Now, health and vigor are blessings in themselves, and considered as involving a capacity for activity and usefulness, cannot be too gratefully acknowledged. But we need not speak of the gross and impious perversion, of which, for our trial, they have been made susceptible. How merciful that interposition, often, which, through whatever instrumentality, impairs a man's health and vigor, and brings him down gradually and thoughtfully to the grave. What is the health of many a youth but a curse in the perversion, an implement wherewith he insults the authority, and contemns the mercy, and defies the power of God. Even under its best improvement to wise and gracious ends, it is no substitute for God. It is not by health that men live, nor in which is the life of their spirit. Neither is God in such wise dependent on a man's health, that He cannot do for him as much as health has ever accomplished, and infinitely more. By his death he may glorify God more than by his life. Our narrative shows this. Here is a good man and a wise king, whom, at an eventful crisis, and for his own sake, God had laid on a bed of affliction. In the view of this man all is lost, all is irrecoverably lost. The Church, the State, his name and his throne, his health and his succession, have all vanished from his possession and enjoyment as the baseless fabric of a vision—all is gloom with him—all is despondence. But mark, as he lay

* Ps. xlv. 10.

writhing on his bed in penitence and prayer, how God fought for him—how he slew his enemies—how he defended the city—how he recovered the consecrated treasure—how he reprieved Hezekiah himself from the sentence of death, and raised him up to the renewed enjoyment of health and vigor. And is the Lord less in all this goodness and in all this mercy because often manifested through ordinary instrumentalities? Is He to be the less seen—the less felt—the less acknowledged? O how impressive is not the admonition of Moses to Israel, in recognition of the eternal truth of the text. “And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no. And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.”*

It is worthy of notice, that through this vital principle, our Lord himself repelled the tempter under one of his most insidious approaches. The devil would put him on extraordinary means, and without warrant, for supply of bread under the plea of hunger, our Lord having just terminated a fast of forty days; but our Lord repels the temptation by the very sentiment expressed in our text: “It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”†

Other illustrations might be offered, but enough has

* Deut. viii. 2.

† Matt. iv. 4.

been drawn out of the case of Hezekiah, to show the impiety of an absolute rest upon means, irrespectively of God. That wise king was made to see and to feel this truth. He once trusted in princes—then he trusted in riches—then he trusted in the vigor of health, and in the effectiveness of his own valor; but God showed him that man doth not live by bread alone, but by whatever He himself may overrule or employ for saving ends. “Trust in the Lord,” says Solomon, “with all thy heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”* Never was a man more convinced of these truths, than became Hezekiah. He seems to have been awakened from a dream, in which the word and power of the Most High had been veiled from his heart. “O Lord!” he exclaims, “by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit.”

There is a peculiar spirit of the mind, in sympathy with that of our Lord, which delights in this recognition of the Holy Father in all our ways. It disposes a man to rebuke vain confidence in every form. It treads “softly,”† mingling with the clearest convictions of the understanding, and the use of the best adapted means, a devout recognition of God, and submissiveness to His will.

To conclude, we should never surrender the mind and heart to gloomy and desponding presage of the future. God’s dealings with His people are wise, gracious and merciful. By these things we live, and in these things is the life of our spirit. Natural means, indeed, may fail; ordinary instrumentalities may be rendered ineffective; neither the fig-tree, nor the vine,

* Prov iii. 6.

† Is. xxxviii. 15.

nor the olive, nor the field, nor the fold, nor the stall, may minister their accustomed supplies; riches may wing their flight; sickness may enervate our frames, and disease gnaw upon our vitals; but the Lord God is the strength of His people, their unfailing ability to endure all that will be permitted to come upon them. His word, His wisdom, His power, His grace, His mercy, are pledged for their enduring consolation and support. These are the things by which men live, and in all these things is the life of their spirits.



SERMON XLIX.

SPIRITUAL MANHOOD.

“But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.”—
1 John ii. 20.

TRUE religion is at unity with itself, but in practice it is necessarily presented under various aspects of realization. These aspects must depend on our several stages of maturation in the divine life. In one view, indeed, our best estate is altogether vanity. The present life, under the most favorable circumstances, is but a day of small things; still, the life which the Christian now lives has within itself an active and inherent vitality which looks beyond the grave, and is destined to unfold in glory, honor, and immortality. We are taught not to despise the day of small things. Even here, the life eternal has not only its *rise* within the soul, but also its progress. We read in Scripture not only of

“new-born babes,”* characterized by a mysterious appetency for the sincere milk of the word; but of little children led by the Spirit from strength to strength, or changed by the Spirit from glory to glory. Of young men, also, whose peculiar office under the Spirit it is to illustrate the principles of sobriety or self-government. Of manhood, also, imbued with an unction from the Holy One, in itself of such lively inspiration on the soul as to supersede, in a great measure, the way-marks and other guidances of indispensable moment to earlier days. It is the condition of spiritual manhood, we may perceive, which is addressed in our text. “But ye have an unction from the Holy one, and ye know all things.” In discoursing from this topic, we shall endeavor to unfold some of the leading characteristics of spiritual manhood, in contrast with spiritual childishness, by means of which our own relation to that attainable measure of grace may be determined with all needful precision. It was early predicted that the Gospel day would be marked by extraordinary spiritual endowments; not those merely of a miraculous kind, which the Apostles and others evinced in the first struggles of our holy religion, but those of an abiding, supernatural kind, which are within the common experience of riper Christians. St. Paul to the Hebrews, when endeavoring to elevate them from childish things, and to introduce them to the enlargement of spiritual manhood, cites the Divine promise to this effect: “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord. I will put my laws into their mind,”† which implies an unction from the Holy One in its applica-

* 1 Pet. ii. 2.

† Heb. viii. 10.

tion to the understanding, the judgment, and conscience; "and I will write them in their hearts," which implies an unction from the Holy One in its application to the will and affections; "and I will be to them a God," in the way of rule, protection, favor, and blessing; "and they shall be to me a people," in the way of public profession, incorporation into the Church, humiliation for sin, faith unfeigned, meekness of the will, elevation and devoutness of affection, lowliness and universality of obedience; "and they shall not teach, every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know me from the least to the greatest"—a commentary on which is most happily conveyed in our text. "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things;" or, as it is afterwards expressed by the same Apostle, "The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you."* Now, as this unction from the Holy One is represented as the distinguishing attribute of the Gospel day, so no doubt whatever can be entertained, that we have all received it in its primary application to the understanding, to the judgment, and conscience. We all sit before God to-day as a people on whom light hath shone. We may hate this light. Neither come to the light. The Gospel, indeed, may not as yet have been written in our hearts, and consequently we may not love and obey this light as we ought to do; but that it has been put within our mind is one of those interesting truths which a sinner, when rightly affected, has ever been ready to acknowledge. With the Prodigal Son he is obliged to confess, that

* 1 John ii. 27.

his disobedience has been sin against Heaven—a resistance to the anointing which he had received. This is the conviction which now gives to his spirit the humiliating sense of unworthiness, while it raises his unfeigned estimation of the forbearing goodness and mercy of God. It is observable, that when the Apostles address the Churches, they proceed on the assumption, that they to whom they wrote need not so much to be enlightened, as to be incited to walk in, to obey the light. They recall to mind things of acknowledged verity, rather than communicate new things. They address the heart rather than the head. Thus St. John: “I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it.”* So also St. Paul: “But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you, for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.”† So also St. Peter: “Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.”‡ All these passages, with some others of like import, show what our Lord declares, “that light has come into the world,”§ that an unction from the Holy One has illuminated the understanding, the judgment, and the conscience of men; that the Gospel has really and truly been so far put within their minds, and makes the sure ground of appeal within every man, on which, through the Spirit, he may be successfully incited to love and obey it. “Arise, shine,” says the Evangelical Prophet, “for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.”|| The great end of the ministry within the Church is, under the Spirit, to stir up the gift of

* 1 John ii. 21. † 1 Thess. iv. 9. ‡ 2 Pet. i. 12. § John iii. 19. || Is. ix. 1.

glory which rests upon her ; to incite the unction from the Holy One which she has received, and which abideth in her, and for this end, that her light may not prove her condemnation, but, under the Spirit, be made unto her wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. For it is not so much light as wisdom which makes the distinguishing mark of spiritual manhood, and true wisdom consists in a subordinated will, and affection, and obedience to the anointment bestowed upon us. It is a common but dangerous mistake, and, we fear, but too often fatal, to be looking out of ourselves for something new or exciting in religion, when in truth and reality we may, under the Spirit, look within the secret chambers of our own bosoms and know all things. True religion has nothing of the lo here ! or lo there ! which rightly pertains to it. We need no messenger to ascend or to descend, to bring down or to bring up, Christ. We have within us an abiding illumination from the Holy One. Christ is in us ; His glory resteth upon us. "The word is nigh thee," which implies no insuperable difficulty in the way of salvation ; "even in thy mouth," in the way of a public confession of the Lord Jesus ; "and in thy heart,"* in the way of faith unfeigned, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience. Yes, it is a cheering truth, and worthy of all acceptation, that the sacred impress of the Gospel within us may, under the Spirit, become our wisdom, our sanctification. We say, under the Spirit, for no power other than that which put the truth within our minds, can write that truth in our hearts, as the chosen instrument of our sanctification. This, then, we conceive to be the grand charac-

• Deut. xxx. 14.

teristic of spiritual manhood. Not illumination merely, for this is common to us all, and is now the condemnation of but too many among us; but *wisdom* perfected by obedience, of which very excellent things are spoken in the Scriptures. When the Apostle became a man, he put away childish things, and a look into these childish things may help us to realize our own attainment in holy and heavenly wisdom. The question here, we may perceive, concerns not those who act either against conscience, after the manner of some, or without conscience, after the manner of others. It concerns the professedly serious Christian, and may determine the point, whether, with the light of manhood, we may not have combined the condition of those who speak as a child, who understand as a child, who think as a child. That this strange incongruity is within our exposure, no one will doubt who has marked the tenor of the inspired exhortations.

The first indication of spiritual childishness we shall notice, is an inconstancy of judgment in religion—an unsettled disposition of mind—which the Apostle describes as ever learning, and yet never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.* The Apostle encountered this childishness among the Ephesians, and we may perceive in his Epistle how much solicitude it cost him. He shows them that the several conditions within the Church were endowed with their respective gifts, and that all these endowments were intended for the perfecting of the saints—for the edifying of the Body of Christ, which is his Church; and that this regimen would continue, “till we all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son

* 2 Tim. iii. 7.

of God, unto a perfect man—unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.* And he exhorts them, on this ground of fulness and sufficiency within the Church, to be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine. Unhappily, there will always be found in the religious world what the Apostle, in this connection, terms, “the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness,” which is well calculated to deceive the simple. All unnatural excitements in religion, gotten up for effect, are of this character. Assumed spirituality, beyond the manhood of the Gospel, as portrayed in Scripture, and maintained by the Church—a giving out by this or that Heresiarch that himself is some great one—claims to infallibility—a show of some disintegrated virtue, carried up into a glittering and imposing altitude;—all these things, and others of like character, though an offence to the simplicity of truth, have exerted their seductive influence on the minds of many a sincere but simple-minded Christian, and carried him about as at the mercy of every wind.

Now we will not say that this inconstancy of judgment in religion is sinful. It has marked many a sincere and piously-devoted Christian. But we do say it is childish. It is unworthy of the unction from the Holy One which we have received. It indicates the religious attainment to be infinitely short of manhood. Spiritual manhood is satisfied with the fulness of God’s House. It is represented as a cleaving to the Apostles, under every incitement to a contrary obedience; as a continuing in the Apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers;† as a

* Eph. iv. 13.

† Acts ii. 42.

growing up into Him, in all things, which is the Head, even Christ.* Another indication of spiritual childishness, is afforded in our susceptibility of worldly ardor or intensity. This will apply either to the love of worldly pleasures, or to worldly hopes and expectations, or to worldly disappointments and losses, or to the defamation of character, or other injuries received in mind, body or estate. Now it is true there is a gift of worldly pleasure which comes from God, as there is a gift from Him, also, of worldly eminence or distinction, whether it be contemplated in wealth, power, influence, domestic comfort—all or either of which, as they meet us in our pathway upward, may gratefully be accepted from the all-kind Giver.

All forms of “the unrighteous mammon”† admit of religious improvement; and where God confers a gift, we may look to him for wisdom profitable to direct. Such a moderated temper of mind in relation to worldly things, is a token of spiritual manhood, and worthy of the unction we have received from the Holy One. The name of the Lord is blessed by us, whether that name be associated with the giving or with the taking away. But when the heart is perceived to burn, either in the anticipation or realization of these earthly day-dreams, and an ardor perceived within, which no estimate of spiritual realities has ever enkindled; when the affections take hold with an absolute and unqualified grasp; and any disappointment or rupture in the issue is attended with something like unto those convulsive throes which, in the natural world, agitate the trees, and throw off their foliage, and scatter their fruits; this is a bad sign, we say.

* Eph. iv. 15.

† Luke xvi. 9.

Such intensity of feeling exhibited is childish, not to say sinful.

Closely allied to this childishness, but not so free from intrinsic guilt, is that devotedness to fashion, which in our day so much mars the beauty and consistency of the Christian profession; that passion, also, for display—an overwrought sensitiveness to the world's opinion—a morbid sensibility to the comforts, conveniences, or luxuries of life—fastidiousness in diet, or the quality of apparel, or in the caste of our association. In all these things there is a qualified sentiment which indicates our wisdom, and shows us to be men; but under the aspect in which these things are commonly beheld and appreciated, they are, to say the least, an insufferable form of childishness, which should long since have disappeared.

Again; there is, with many Christians, a timidity, an irresolution, a fear of ridicule, interwoven as it were with their religious frame, and which, if its demerit be not found in a harder name, must certainly find its classification among the least pardonable forms of spiritual childishness. We see something of this feature in the early history of the disciples; but mark, when they had received an unction from the Holy One, and their spiritual manhood was realized, the Sanhedrim itself was struck with their boldness. They combined with their fidelity to the truth so much deference to the authorities, while their fronts were lusted with so much good feeling, as to excite the admiration and respect of that august body.

Again: There is a spiritual childishness observable with many in their estimate of the religious compliances they yield. However meagre their observances, they seem disposed to fix upon them a very high valu-

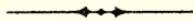
ation. They are not unlike to children, who call upon us to notice, as they exercise their newly-acquired powers. Now spiritual manhood, after it has done all and infinitely more than a childish vaperer while in this frame, at least, is ever likely to do, feels deeply its own unprofitableness. What duty are we called upon to perform, which has not assumed the air and complexion of a privilege, when rightly regarded. The more highly we prize our privileges, the wider becomes the scope of our cheerful obedience. Spiritual manhood is the condition of a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which it regards as a reasonable service. More than its capabilities is not required, and with less, itself can never be satisfied. Of this childish character also is the performance of a Christian duty, with no reference to the manner of its performance, or to the motive and end of our obedience. Hence a child vaunts where a man is humbled. The former looks upon the act; the latter, on the manner of it. The former sees what he has done; the latter, what he has not done. The former thanks God that he is not as other men are; the latter beseeches God to have compassion on his infirmities.

Other marks of spiritual childishness might be exhibited, such as protracted displeasures, cherished animosities, overwrought expectations and claims on one side, and an affectation on the other of meeting these unwarranted assumptions—wherein the simplicity of truth is offended, and the religious sense corrupted and impaired. But a few concluding remarks will equally apply to every form of this childishness. It is compatible only with the earliest stages of our Christian discipleship, and will never fail to be outgrown, if we grow in grace. There is, indeed, a habit of childish-

ness, which may cleave to men of full stature. But, at whatever sacrifice, these habits must be put off. They are unworthy of those who have received the Spirit's unction. Every Christian knows what it is to be ashamed of words or conduct into which he has been betrayed by the levity or inconsideration of the moment, or by the surprise of his judgment, or by the impulse of passion. The light within him is offended, and no man than himself can regard with deeper detestation the matter of these accidents which have befallen him. They make no part of himself. He lives in another region, breathes another atmosphere, and has sacred and well-founded claims to be pitied, rather than condemned. In this view we should regard every indication of childishness, as something incompatible with our spiritual manhood. Our light has come, and the glory of the Lord has arisen upon us. The anointing which we have received abideth on us, and we need not that any man teach us, for we ourselves, in the very anointing we have received, are taught of God to "be no more children"—"to put away the childish things,"* which, however tenderly we may regard and charitably commiserate in others, can never rightly be tolerated in ourselves. When a youth came running to our Lord, and would have blended in the discipleship of Christ all his anticipations of happiness from earthly possession and power, our Lord is said to have loved him; He compassionated his childishness, and would forthwith have made a man of him. But the heart of the youth was unequal to the terms; he went away sorrowful,—all of which shows us, that the light within us must, under the Spirit, be made unto

* 1 Cor. xiii. 11.

us wisdom perfected by obedience, or we shall never realize the attributes and perfections of the spiritual man. Be assured, to renounce this world implies something more than the utterance of so many words. Neither is it this meagre concession or that, doled out from a reluctant nature, that is to effect the required elevation of our hearts and minds; and yet if we would be perfect, a spiritual separation must be effected between us and all that the heart has been taught by nature to hold dear. The Gospel must be written in these hearts by the finger of God, ere we can will and obey it. We must realize an unction from the Holy One in its application to our wills and affections, or we shall never will what God wills, nor set our affections where He would have them to be—“on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.”* O let us hang no longer on our childhood! Let not its day dreams absorb that time and diligence so imperiously required in preparation for eternity. Rather let us mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.†



SERMON L.

DANGER FROM FAMILIARITY WITH SACRED THINGS AND
PERSONS.

“For neither did His brethren believe in Him.”—John vii. 5.

By comparing some incidental allusions in St. Matthew's Gospel with others in St. Mark and St. John,

* Col. iii. 1.

† Ps. xxxvii. 37.

it will readily appear that the brethren of our Lord here referred to, were the four sons of Mary the wife of Cleophas, and sister to Mary the mother of our Lord. Their names are recorded by two of the Evangelists, while stating the grounds objected by the Nazarenes to the Messiahship of our Lord. "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?"* These were near kinsfolk, according to the flesh, being his cousins, or "brethren," in the Hebrew style of speech, between whom and himself an intimacy, in all probability, had early and long subsisted. In common with the citizens of Nazareth, these brethren, on hearing the admirable discourses delivered by our Lord, and witnessing, in connection with these, the meekness of his wisdom, and his power of appeal in mighty works, both at Cana and Capernaum, were perplexed with doubts and uncertainties. They could not reconcile the facts before them with the depressed circumstances of his birth, and the slender means and opportunities of education which had marked his early days. It was true that there was much before them to impress them favorably, and even to raise their astonishment; for St. Luke informs us, "they all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth;"† but they could not forbear to mingle with these impressions a reflection, which they thought fully confuted his pretensions to the character and office of the long-expected Messiah—"Is not this Joseph's son?" Both their judgment and conscience gave way beneath the force of obstinate prejudice.

* Matt. xiii. 55.

† Luke iv. 22.

Likewise concerning the nature of our Lord's ministry, and its right method of prosecution, were their views grievously mistaken. These views were purely secular. "Depart hence," say they, "and go into Judea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest; for there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, show thyself to the world."* They thought it inconsistent, if not absurd, that one of his august claims should waste so large a portion of time in the obscure corners of Galilee. They would have him depart at once for the metropolis of Judea, where, in attendance on the Feast of Tabernacles, an opportunity would be afforded to show himself to the world, to win its admiration and favor, and establish under its auspices at once himself and his cause.

In reply, our Lord contents himself to meet their secular views with the unwelcome, but unanswerable retort of truth. They themselves, indeed, might go up to Jerusalem, under whatever circumstances, and at whatever time they thought most favorable for their own purposes. They had nothing to apprehend from the world around them; theirs was a secular spirit, and however corrupt, would scarcely fail of acceptance with those who inhaled its incense. The world cannot hate those who symbolize with its genius, its spirit, and its works; but truth it hateth, because it must needs testify that all that pertains to it is evil. He himself neither expected nor could expect any thing from this source but aversion of mind, unjust imputations, dissent from his teachings, scoffs and sneers, persecution and suffering. As to their own disparaging

* John vii. 4.

views of his character and claims, these, without going further, might be sufficiently accounted for on one of their own proverbs. A Prophet is nowhere less esteemed than in his native place, and amidst the circle of his immediate affinities. Here the earthen vessel chosen and consecrated of God to bear to the world his treasures of grace and truth, is most intimately known. Its frailty, in oft recurring instances, has come under observation. In the mean time, the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned. His knowledge concerns the earthen vessel, in relation to which, and without divining the cause, he has been prompted to singular industry of research. Like Eliab, the eldest brother of David, when the latter was chosen of God to blot out the reproach of Israel, he wished, with a leering eye, to know many things—why David had come down hither, and with whom he had left those few sheep in the wilderness? and, in addition to what he wished to know, he had positive knowledge of many other things. He knew the pride and the naughtiness of his heart, and the secret motives of self-confidence, vain-glory, and curiosity which had prompted his movement. He was offended in a youth whom God had chosen—acutely perceptive, indeed, to the infirmities of that chosen vessel, but wrapt in nature's gloom on all that concerned God's treasure in that vessel. This whole connection of the sacred narrative, which records incidents between our Lord and his natural friends, is deeply instructive, and suggests some important truths which we would do well to lay to heart. The leading one of these we shall notice, is our liability to confound familiarity with sacred things with

belief in these things. This, it is to be apprehended, is not unfrequently the case with those who, brought up in a mere speculative belief in Christ, receive their creed through what is now termed religious education. We fear it is the case also with many who have sat for years under the preaching of the Gospel, with no serious, well-directed concern to make their calling and election sure. Now, we would in no wise be understood to undervalue in the least the agency of parents or friends while engaged in pious endeavors, and in lowly dependence on God, to imbue youthful minds with the spirit of true religion. So far from this, the liability before us applies as strictly to the appointed ministry of the Gospel, considered as a human agency, as it does to parents and other governors. In every instance, it may with truth be said, when we have done all within our power to do, we have, in saving effect, done nothing for the subject of our care, nothing intrinsically valuable to the soul; on the contrary, our whole expenditure of natural means, without the Spirit's interposition, may have tended only to infuse a deadly stupor into the soul.

If we look into the circumstances under which the four kinsmen of our Lord had grown up, under the ties of natural affinity with the Son of God, in habits of daily intercourse and familiarity with His name, His person, His example and discourse; if we next consider what is affirmed in our text—"Neither did His brethren believe in Him," and the appalling import of those words addressed to these brethren by our Lord himself—"The world cannot hate you, but me it hateth;"* we cannot but be made to see and to feel, not merely

* John vii. 7.

the impotency of natural means in effecting religious improvement, but the imminent dangers with which, in themselves, all these natural means are necessarily attended. We shall find in the result what St. John witnessed, a light shining in darkness, and the darkness comprehending it not—a savor intended for life, but resulting in death—an intimacy with Christ, and familiarity with His name, which have revealed to the interior eye no spiritual beauty, and warmed the heart with no unfeigned desire towards Him. Many intimations are afforded in Scripture of the fact of intimacy with sacred things, in connection with deadness to any spiritual discernment whatever. “Have I been so long time with you,” said our Lord, “and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?”* So also St. John—“He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew him not.”† His very proximity to the world but enabled the world to spit upon Him, to profane His body, and to torture His nerves. “He came unto His own,” continues St. John, “but His own received Him not.” His very proximity to His own but enabled His own to reject Him with more boldness and ingratitude, to depress His soul with deeper sorrow, to pierce His hands and His feet, and in impious triumph to lift Him up upon the cross. It is true, both in the world and among His own, there were found relicts of a chosen generation, which, in general, had disappeared—certain individuals who lived as a remnant, and represented a by-gone religion—a little flock, successors in faith to Abel, and Seth, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob,—individuals hidden from the world, with interior eyes and ears peculiar to

* John xiv. 9.

† John i. 10.

themselves, mysterious organs of the soul which recognized the Good Shepherd as He opened upon them, knew His voice, having believing hearts that received Him in His humiliation, and prompted a lowly obedience to His word. To them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name; "which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* Now all these things show us that Christ is a Saviour, hidden from the heart by the heart's unbelief, yet very near to us all (as He was near to His kinsmen), and may be overlooked by some as He was by His brethren, and denied by some, and maltreated by others. That His brethren did not believe in Him, we read in the text; that the world knew Him not, and that He was rejected by His own, are sad, unquestioned truths, in all which we have immediate interest. We are not to suppose, indeed, that we can commit such open blasphemy as many in that day committed. But it is another matter, whether we may not commit as great. Sins are often greater which are less startling—not so open, but more heinous—as there are evils deeper, because more subtle. Certain it is, that our Lord has left upon record this monitory declaration: "Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoso speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him."† With this declaration before us, we may remember that we ourselves live not under the personal ministration of our Lord, in relation to which blasphemy is declared to be a pardonable sin; but we live under what the Apostle terms, "the ministration of the Spirit,"‡ under

* John i. 13.

† Matt. xii. 31.

‡ 2 Cor. iii. 8.

the government of that very Holy Ghost against whom unpardonable sin may possibly be committed. With these two propositions, which Scripture has attested, we need connect a third of equal authority; we mean, that the ministration of the Spirit is made visible to us, and known to us only as identified with the Church of the living God, which is now the pillar and ground of all sanctifying truth, in its application to our fallen race. It is called the body of Christ, being in itself a body of humiliation, but not less the appointed token and instrument of the Divine presence. Now, are we not but too prone, from early and long, but unimproved acquaintance, lightly to regard the Church, her sacred things, the Scriptures, the worship, the ministry, the sacraments? Are we in no danger of contracting that terrible familiarity with these sacred things, which impairs reverence, which leaves the conscience asleep under their exhibition, and the heart unaffected by them? It is awful to think of the relation of His brethren to our Lord. Brought up with Him, in habits of daily intercourse with Him for months and years together, yet closed in every avenue to their hearts against His divinity by the familiarity and irreverence of every-day life. And it may become just so with ourselves in relation to all that is now associated in Scripture with the abidings of the Holy Ghost. With what little impression of God may not some of us have come up hither this morning? With what unfixeness of heart may we not have engaged in worship. How little heed may we not have taken in hearing the word of God? With what summary examination may we not, from time to time, have eaten of that sacramental bread and drank of that cup? How lightly may we not have entered into the spirit of that pre-

cept which bids us “know them that are over us in the Lord, and admonish us, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake?”* Now, all these sacred things are tokens of the Divine presence among us, and instruments of the power of the Holy Ghost. What of sanctification have we received which has not approached us, however unconsciously to ourselves, through the medium of these sacred things? What of further sanctification do we need, which we are not authorized to expect from the Holy Ghost through these appointed channels? Surely any sentiments, or feelings of irreverence or lightness, concerning these hallowed things, should find their rebuke in the warning declaration we have quoted. It may not seem to us so startling a sin, indeed, to speak evil of them, as to speak against the Son of Man, nor is it asserted that such sin constitutes *the* unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost; but we do assert that the man thus guilty of evil-speaking against holy things, *puts himself in the line of its commission and of incurring its penalty.*

To conclude: there is one token of the Divine Presence which claims especial attention from us, as being most liable to be overlooked or disregarded; we mean the poor man, the weak-minded, the unprotected female, the afflicted in any form. Christ identified himself with these. We are said to have done to Him what we do to these. These, therefore, are now a token to us of the Holy Ghost. Let us take heed, that we despise not the poor, but rather turn our face towards them, that the Holy Ghost in them may turn His face towards us, in supply of all our spiritual necessities. Let us rather inquire into their wants, and meet them

* 1 Thess. v. 13.

with a cheerful heart, as God hath given ability and as opportunity may serve. "Take heed," said our Lord, "that ye despise not one of these little ones that believe in me."* Rather under the Spirit let us aim to serve God, through all these tokens of His presence and instruments of His power, with reverence and with godly fear; always remembering that God hath chosen weak things, and things despised by an ungodly world, to confound mighty things, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are. Especially, in all our endeavors to do good, let us realize our dependence on the Holy Ghost for effective power. We have seen that no natural relationship to Christ, no familiarity of intercourse with Him, can meet the necessities of our souls. We need that faith which is of the operation of God, which purifies the heart and overcomes the world; we need lowly obedience to His word. These only create the true kindredship with the Redeemer. "Who is my mother or my brethren?" asked our Lord. "Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in Heaven, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother."†

SERMON LI.

THE CHILL OF LOVE THROUGH THE ABOUNDING OF SIN.

"And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold; but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."—Matt. xxiv. 12, 13.

THIS is among the private instructions delivered by our Lord to his disciples. In the preceding part of

* Matt. xviii. 10.

† Matt. xii. 50.

His discourse, he had forewarned them of approaching persecutions, and the consequent test to which their religious character would be subjected. Their adversary, the devil, whom His Gospel opposed, and whose kingdom it threatened with demolition, though curtailed in his actual power, would be found sleepless in his hostility, and full of all craft and subtlety. Not content with an absolute sway within the kingdoms of this world, he would meditate the subjugation of the Christian Church, as of another Paradise. In aiming to achieve this triumph, he would first swell the stream of iniquity within the world, its native channel; inundate the contiguous low ground of the Redeemer's kingdom; sweep off its unwary occupants, by means of false prophets, into jarring sectaries; and through their less suspected but more effective agency, mar the peace, chill the affections, and retard the progress of the Christian Church. Such appears to be the device of Satan, as exposed by our Lord, and of which his disciples were premonished in the discourse of which our text is a part. Hear Him: "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." Of course, while the Church remained true to her Redeemer, and consistent with herself, this abounding of iniquity within the world would avail the enemy nothing; on the contrary, it would ultimately be made to accelerate the advancement of the cause of God. The blood of the Martyr is the seed of the Church. Who is he that shall harm the Church, if she be a follower of that which is good? But mark the legitimate effect of this device of Satan on the incautious, the adventurous, the half-hearted disciples of Christ. "And then," continues our Lord, "shall many be offended, and shall be-

tray one another, and shall hate one another." Here, then, we have the beginning of evil within the Church, as *before* we had the beginning of sorrows. The strife and division which strictly pertain to an evil world, have passed their barriers. These half-hearted Christians, it appears, cannot patiently endure the trials to which they are exposed. The unstable ground they occupy will not admit of their standing fast. Evil-affectioned as they are, and vacillating between two kingdoms, they cannot brave the imputations, the scoffs, the reproach, the inflictions which assail them. They fall away from Christ, and consequently from each other; they betray one another to the common enemy; they cherish towards each other unworthy sentiments and feelings of embittered hostility. Were angels in like unlawful circumstances with themselves, they would do the same. But this is not all. "And many false Prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many." It appears from this prophecy of our Lord's, that the leaders of divers heretical sects, such as Hymeneus and Philetus, mentioned by the Apostle, are, in the mean time, not expected to be idle. As evil affection has found admission within the Church, these false prophets rise up, as under the inspiration of new hopes, and deceive the hearts of many. But the evil stops not here. "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Evil at all times is diffusive, but never more so than when mixed up with that which is good, and propagated under the semblance of religion. As the iceberg is not only cold in itself, but spreads its chill far and wide, so the evil here noticed by our Lord is not likely to be circumscribed in its extent; under its influence, "the love of many shall wax cold;" the tone of their piety will be seriously affected; the

love of the world will consume their zeal for the prosperity of Zion ; a general indifference to the first principles of the doctrine of Christ will pervade his Church. Such appears to be our Lord's warning to his disciples, and recorded by the holy Evangelist for our learning. In the expression, "iniquity shall abound," there seems to be an allusion to those rivers which periodically overflow their banks and deluge their bottoms around ; such, for instance, as the river Jordan. However its turbid waters may ordinarily keep within their appointed channel, and pursue their downward course, intermingled with dangerous rapids ; with whatever present advantage adventurers may fix their abode within the adjacent plain ; yet the season invariably comes round, when Jordan swells into a frightful and destructive inundation. So iniquity is a turbid, unfailing stream : the Evil One is its source ; the world is its appointed channel ; its outlet is the sea of death. The blinded and deluded victims of the god of this world are borne along this stream, so pleasantly to themselves often, and with so slight an apprehension of danger, that it is no unusual thing for a man of this world to awake from his day-dream, only in time to start back at the awful and almost irremediable destruction which opens before him. Now, were the Evil One less swayed with the malice of a devil, he would be content to rule the world allotted him, to confine the stream of his iniquity within its proper channel ; the result then, however fatal to the world, would create no liability to danger on the part of the Church. The Church of Christ, as such, is not of this world. She is chosen out of this world. She has renounced all allegiance to the god of this world ; is separate in distinctive principle, spirit, and supremacy of affection ;

her life is hid with Christ in God ; her citizenship is in Heaven. Her low ground, indeed, is contiguous to the very channel of iniquity, and in this circumstance are fixed at once the hopes of Satan and the exposure of the Church. But we should remember that the Spirit of inspiration, who is neither ignorant of Satan's device nor regardless of the liabilities of the Church, has interdicted, on the part of professing Christians, all border settlement. We are required by our religion not only to come out from the world, but to be entirely separate therefrom ; to have no fellowship with its unfruitful works ; not to tarry in all the plain ; but to ascend the hill of the Lord, and to rise up into his holy place. In passing from the world into the Church proper, we, indeed, must needs cross the plain ; but we here tarry at our peril. Woe be to that Christian professor who, lured by any present advantage, and heedless of Divine admonition, has here fixed his abiding-place ! such adventurers live, indeed, at the mercy of their adversary, the devil. They are under no assured protection of the Most High. Their hazards are most imminent. As Satan has power within the world, and may there swell, at his pleasure, the torrent of his iniquity, so he is permitted of God, and at his own pleasure, to overflow all the low ground of the Church, and thousands have thence been swept in the broad current of death. Now, the approaching swell of ungodliness to which our Lord more particularly alluded, we are informed did actually take place ; and what is more, all the detail of its legitimate effects on his adventurous disciples, as recorded in our chapter, was realized. That flood was one of iniquitous persecution, levelled at the truth of God, which had exposed, and now threatened with overthrow, the predominant cor-

ruption. As the truth itself could neither be gainsayed nor resisted, so the malice and fury of the oppressor were turned against its avowed advocates and friends. Here, from the inattention or disregard of many to our Lord's warning voice, the adversary was but too successful. The first indication of their meagre attainments in Christian knowledge and grace, was afforded in bitter dissensions among themselves. The enemy, it seems, had succeeded in arraying one disciple against another. Presently, they began to betray one another to the common adversary, and to hate one another with a bitter hatred. Tacitus, speaking of the persecution under Nero, says, "At first several were seized, who confessed, and then, by their discovery, a great multitude of others were convicted and executed." It would seem that these victims of ungodliness could not endure to suffer for truth and righteousness' sake, but chose rather to accept deliverance from the enemy on the terms of a general betrayal of their brethren. On the contrary, mark the spirit and affection of those who had improved the warnings of their Redeemer, had pressed forward, had risen up into the Lord's holy place, and fixed their habitation high upon the mount of holiness. They shared in the common sufferings, indeed, and took joyfully these sufferings, even unto death; but they held fast to the truth as it is in Jesus; they let no man take their crown; they maintained their fidelity to the truth and their charity to men. Even in their persecutors, they saw but the blinded dupes of the god of this world, and entertained towards them no other emotions than those of commiseration, and of pious intercession with God in their behalf. Now, though the source of iniquity is the same in all ages, and the channel is the same; yet the iniquity itself, the dark water, though

the same in its essential properties, will accommodate itself to different ages and the ever-varying circumstances of men. In the present day, we are the less to suspect it in those grosser forms, and under those hideous aspects which it formerly assumed. We are to look for it in that spiritual wickedness and refinement of opposition to God, which, being mixed up with much that is good in itself and imposing in its claims, eludes the common eye, deceives the simple-hearted, and therefore demands the unceasing vigilance and fidelity of all Christian people, but especially of those who are set of God for defence. Such vigilance, such fidelity, are now the more required, because at no time has the adversary, in his design upon the Church, caused his deep waters more to abound. Look abroad into the world. How have not false prophets arisen, violated, and corrupted the fair form of primitive Christianity? How have not their schisms multiplied and their heresies grown thick and rank? The hearts of many shall be deceived, said our Lord, and how has not this declaration been verified? What countless numbers of pious and well-disposed persons have not thus been entrapped? How would not their consciences be smitten, and their hearts grieved, could they but see as God sees and his word declares—that in ignorance and unbelief they have yielded themselves, their piety, their wealth, their influence, their example to buttress the pride of ambitious men, and this at the expense of their Redeemer's Church? In the mean time, look at Romanism, rising up as flushed with new hopes! Mark that fell power which, with more than fabled adroitness, can accommodate its aspect and its principles to the prevailing lusts of all ages. If by their fruits we shall know them, what, then, must not be our conclu-

sion on a survey of those nations on the moral character of which this spiritual despotism has been illustrated? What countless numbers have not here been deceived? What illustrious piety has not here been misdirected? What inestimably precious docility of spirit has not here been betrayed? What devotedness to God has not here been perverted? If from these varied forms of iniquity which have assumed the guise of religion, and insinuated themselves into the hearts of the unwary, we turn to the *world*, the home-bed of iniquity, what aboundings of sublimated ungodliness shall we not behold? See the disparagement in which the plain and unpretending, but useful and commendable engagements of life are held and regarded. Mark the prevailing dissatisfaction among all classes of men, with the slow and regular returns of honest industry. Mark the concentrated and overbearing passion for the sudden accumulation of wealth—the rage for vain show at whatsoever expense—the enormous expenditures under the lusts of the eye and the pride of life. Observe the increasing contempt with which authority is regarded—the subtle elusion of law—the impunity of wickedness and vice, especially in high places—the prostitution of that tremendous power, the press, to mere personal or party aggrandizement. In a word, mark that restless and ungovernable spirit which now worketh in the children of disobedience—that impetuous current of sublimated opposition to God, which distracts an evil world, politically and ecclesiastically, and bears on to ruin its deluded victims. We ask, after casting an eye over these things, what may not be the liabilities of the Church? Does she stand fast? Does she retain her crown? Is she still primitive in her faith, apostolic in her order, unceasing in her prayer,

ardent in heavenly affection, steadfast in hope, and rooted in charity? Is she terrible to the world, as an army with banners, because clear as the sun in the Gospel she promulges, and fair as the moon in the reflection of its grace? O! how critical become the circumstances of the Church when iniquity abounds, and especially in the varied and imposing forms which characterize the age. What but inundation must sweep over her exposed places? What but to be condemned with the world, and to perish with the world, have their slumbering occupants to expect? May it not be, beloved friend, that your spiritual existence is but a name to live, and that, in reality, all that was substantial within you has been borne away in the overflowings of ungodliness? If iniquity has abounded in the world, and overflowed this channel, how, in the name of God, in your unlawful position, have you escaped? Look seasonably into this matter; compare your religion with that once illustrated by the Saints. May it not thence appear that the spirit rather of the worldly man is your spirit—his delusion yours also? The subject is one of vital consequence to us all. It addresses itself first to the established Christian. The text conveys a plain intimation that the disciple of Christ, even of highest attainment and of best regulated affection, will, nevertheless, under the abounding of iniquity, find much to endure even unto the end. On condition of steadfastness in faith and patience is his salvation alone assured. “He that endureth unto the end, the same shall be saved.” His religious affections may, indeed, fluctuate under baneful exhalations from the world, as well as from the low grounds of the Church, which compass him about. “The love of many shall wax cold.” The hope of many shall be shorn of its lustre; but you

need take care, my Christian friend, to oppose to these fluctuations the stability of your faith and patience, your unfaltering confidence in God, your quiet and reverential submission to His holy will. Let no man take your crown. To you the abounding of iniquity, with its chilling damps, can serve but to incite to a higher and yet closer walk with God, and to elicit deeper aspirations for the enjoyment of that celestial peace which is as a sea of glass in the calm of eternity. These present trials will soon be over, and your spirit, like an eagle from the cage, shall "mount up on wings," and expatiate in a region of uninterrupted serenity and love.

The subject addresses itself, secondly, to those who by baptism profess to have come out from the world, but are not yet found removed beyond the reach of its ungodliness. It seems you cannot endure temptation; you cannot suffer for truth and righteousness' sake; you cannot brave the world's dread frown, nor tread its missiles beneath your feet. You, beloved friend, need but recur to the imagery we have employed, and to the position there assigned you, in order to derive a distinct impression of your danger. Your fault is not that, having but recently crossed the line which divides opposing kingdoms, you must necessarily be exposed in a peculiar way to the waves of ungodliness. If bent in heart on your heavenly destination, humble and confiding in your spirit, and diligent in the prosecution of your pious purpose, the low ground in religious attainment you necessarily traverse is continually an uprising ground. "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Lord himself shall lift up a standard against him."*

* Is lix. 19.

“The Lord himself is thy keeper; the Lord is thy defence upon thy right hand.”* You will grow in grace, you will increase in knowledge, you will speedily attain to that gracious eminence within the Church, the occupants of which are not ignorant of Satan’s device, and can smile at his rage. To you, as one speeding across the plain, the admonition in our text is not without its use. It is a spur to your diligence and an incentive to your perseverance. It seems to say, “Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure. Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.” But sad indeed is the case of those who, with neither desire nor purpose to advance, have pitched on midway space between Zoar and Sodom; who traffic on both sides; have hearts behind and hopes before; find their position so convenient to the world that they can reap with the world, and so convenient to the Church that they hope to reap with the Church. What shall or can we say more in point than an Apostle has said? “Brethren, be not deceived; God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that also shall he reap.”† Look, beloved friend, from the delusion within your heart to the facts of your case, as unfolded by the word of truth. Why, the region you occupy is forbidden, and no consideration can justify an entrance upon it but that of the necessity of passing through it. In every other view, the Evil One has power over it—can flood it at his pleasure from the channel of his own ungodliness. Under what aspect of iniquity has not the world a rivalry in these low grounds of the Church? With what facility are not

* Ps. cxxi. 5.

† Gal. vi. 7.

its overflowings here received? With what concentrated feeling is not reputation with the world, and on its own principles, here regarded? Look at the pomps and vanities of the world, and then, at this inspiration of the Evil One as here displayed. Is not the conclusion as evident as the premises are just and Scriptural, that these low grounds of the Church, by Divine permission, are at the mercy of our adversary, the devil—subject to his power, and therefore, as an abiding place, are wholly unfit, as they are wholly unsafe, for Christian occupation? “If the Lord be God, serve him; but if Baal, serve him.”* “Either make the tree good, and his fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt, for the tree is known by his fruit.”†

Finally, the subject addresses itself indirectly to the man of the world. If the whole world lieth in the wicked one; if this is the set channel of his iniquity under every aspect, in which, whether the stream be shallow or overflowing, sluggish or brisk, it must pass down, and bear on to ruin its unhappy victims; then, beloved friend, what have you to expect as a constituent part of this devoted community? What are your hopes as a man of the world? God, indeed, your Creator, has not been unmindful of your appalling circumstances. “He so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”‡ But this wonderful exhibition of Divine love you disregard. God calls you by the Gospel of His Son, by the secret monitions of His Spirit, by the dispensations of His Providence; but you refuse. He stretches out His hand, to inspire your filial confidence, but you regard

* 1 Kings xviii. 21.

† Matt. xii. 33.

‡ John iii. 16.

it not. Onward you go to ruin, not but that you have eyes to see, but you have closed them; not but that you have the light, but you recoil from the light, and confound the indisposition of your pride with a thousand imaginary inabilities. In the mean time you live in a state of condemnation. The wrath of God abideth on you. Each revolving day diminishes so much from your probationary term, and brings you nearer to your appointed destination. O! if amidst the abounding of iniquity the plain of the Church shall be deluged and swept of its adventurous occupants; if the love of many shall wax cold, and even the best of men, to retain their privileges, shall be made to press up into nearer and more intimate walks with God, then what must not be your inevitable destiny, who rush down to ruin in the very home-bed of these dark impetuous waters? Slumber as you may, and debate as you may, the current rolls on, and you are gazed upon by the universe as an existence hurried along to interminable tribulation and anguish beyond the grave. "Awake! Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."* "Come out from among them, and be ye separate; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters," saith the Lord Almighty.†

* Eph. v. 14.

† 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

SERMON LII.

YOUTHFUL SOBRIETY.

“Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded.”—Titus ii. 6.

It was an impressive scene within the early Church of the Redeemer, when young men, with so many counter objects to engross their attention, and so many inviting pleasures to engage their pursuits, rose superior to every temptation, and blended their destinies in both worlds with the cause of Christ. The impressiveness of the spectacle was deepened by the seemingly inauspicious circumstances which, at this early period, hung over their cause. There was nothing, besides its own intrinsic weight and worth, to interest the feelings and affections of any man, but especially young men, naturally averse to self-restraint and alive to the seductive pleasures of a vain, fugitive world. They could not have avoided witnessing the contempt, and scoff, and persecution with which the Gospel and its advocates were treated by the reputed wisdom as well as by the authority of the age. Who, under these circumstances, would expect to have found, within the pale of discipleship, young men devoted to the cause of a despised Master in their time, in their talents, in their faculties, in their possessions—young men knowing the God whom their fathers never knew, and serving Him, in the Gospel of His Son, with a perfect heart and a willing mind? Our text incidentally drops an intimation, that young men, at this early period of the Church, were thus found. St. Paul, in his charge to Titus, directs his attention to this interesting portion of his pastoral

care: "Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded." Christian exhortation implies previous instruction. Instruction is addressed to the understanding—exhortation to the heart and its affections; it consists in furnishing animating motives to an obedience which previous instruction had made plain. Titus is charged, therefore, to move the minds of young men by moral incitements to the culture of sober-mindedness. Sober-mindedness is a solid virtue essential to the consistency and security of the Christian calling. We purpose, then, to define more particularly this Christian grace; then show, from the Scriptures, how this grace may be cultivated; and lastly, apply the Apostolic charge.

Christian sobriety, or sober-mindedness, is the habitual subordination of the natural passions, feelings, and affections, to the restraints of Christ's yoke. It is opposed to that unguarded state of the mind and heart which results from the neglect of early Christian discipline, and under the influence of which young men grow up the mere creatures of passion, the sport of every passing impulse. Now, in the constitution of our moral frame, our natural passions, feelings, or affections, are very inferior powers. They have, indeed, a place assigned them, and are eminently useful within their sphere. They make good servants; but, when elevated to the chair of authority, they become tyrants and lords of misrule. Christian sober-mindedness, therefore, does not imply the extinction of natural passion, feeling, or affection; but their habitual subjection to that higher and nobler power which we term the Gospel. We should remember that reason itself is rightly subject to this supernatural power; how much more, then, the inferior powers which, in the order of our nature, are subjected to reason. This discipline of the natural

passions, when early achieved and devoutly maintained, becomes a fixed habit of mind, so that it proves as easy and pleasant to hold these lower powers under the restraints of the Spirit, as to hold a family in order, where the principles of wholesome restraint have been early inculcated and judiciously enforced. With peculiar fitness, then, the culture and maturing of sober-mindedness may be urged upon young men, and especially upon those who, though now religiously inclined, yet suffer under the sad consequences of early neglect. In earlier life the passions, however vigorous, are more readily subdued. The mind at this period is much more easily swayed by religious motive. Christian exhortation finds its way more readily to the heart. There is meaning in the counsel under which we are bid to remember our Creator in the days of our youth, before the evil days arrive,* which, partly from the natural force of passion, and partly from habits of indulgence on our part, may find us morally disqualified either to receive Christian instruction or to be profited by Christian exhortation. "Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded." We proceed to show, from Scripture, how this solid grace may be attained under the Spirit. "Wherewithal," says David, "shall a young man cleanse his way?"† Here is an inquiry, which should awaken the attention and stir the heart of every youth. "*Wherewithal*"—where, for this end, are the counsels to be had, and what the means to be employed in this great work of renovation? How shall a youth born of the flesh, and who with the flesh has inherited the supremacy and the misrule of a corrupt nature—how shall this heir of libertinism become sober-minded?

* Eccl. xii. 1.

† Ps. cxix. 9, &c.

Let every young man lay it to heart. Inspiration has left him neither to the counsels of his own heart, nor to the device of his own imagination, nor to any efficacy of his own might or resolution. The inquiry concerning young men, which David propounds, can be happily met only by the voice of inspired truth. But one authoritative answer can be given, and this is contained in the Scriptures: "By taking heed thereto according to thy word." David immediately proceeds to illustrate, from the annals of his own experience, the prescribed course: "With my whole heart have I sought thee." By this we may perceive at once, that whole-heartedness is an indispensable prerequisite to our gracious deliverance from the misrule of blind passion; it implies the conviction of insufficiency on our own part, and of the necessity of supernatural intervention in our behalf. This conviction is essential to whole-heartedness. "Ye shall seek me and find me," saith the Lord, "when ye shall search for me with all your heart."* Young men, who lament the dominancy of sense over their judgment and faith, and would fain be delivered from its oppression, should inquire how far whole-heartedness in the appeal to God is evidenced in the course they pursue. Be assured this integrity of heart, which alone has the promise, is best known by its fruit. Young men, we all know, evidence their whole-heartedness in other engagements and pursuits. The indications they afford are infallible; no man mistakes them; they speak a language intelligible to all. Well, it must become so in the case before us. It was David's first step in the moral revolution under which the usurpation of natural passion was arrested, and the

* Jer. xxix. 13.

passion itself subordinated to a nobler power. And what is an appeal to God, without a whole heart, but an impious profanation of holy things? But this is not all. "Thy word," continues David, "have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." He did not affect to despise the power of the passions, but took effectual measures to parry their thrusts, and even to silence their insidious appeals. For this end he hid or treasured the word of God in his heart. "To treasure the word of God in the heart, is to season the heart with its power." The word of God, when rightly conceived of, is a power spiritual and abiding. It constitutes an effective force which instinctively rises within us, as the occasion may require, and rebukes with authority the incursion of any inordinate feeling or affection. The Scriptures are but a record of this power, and may be held in severance from it; but the power itself is spiritual, and in all ages has been treasured by the servants of God, and found to be all-sufficient.

All mere verbal forms of Scripture are of no other value, than as, under the Spirit, they are made subservient in originating this power within us. We may conceive this power to exist in a measure independently of the Scriptures. This is the case with many unlettered Christians, who evidence the power in the control of passion, though ignorant of the verbal form. Nor is the converse of this proposition less true; for it is a lamentable fact, that many are intimately acquainted with the verbal form or letter of Scripture, who practically deny the power thereof. The Word of God, indeed, is within their hands, and often impressed upon their memories; but they afford melancholy evidence of disregard of its rightful authority over every con-

trary incitement. This was not the case with the youthful David. The Word of God was laid up in his heart, and there existed as a weapon of defence. The impulse of passion was soothed by the Divine precepts. The allurements of passion were counter-worked by the Divine promises. The menace of passion was rebuked by the Divine denunciation. His whole-heartedness had taken to itself the whole armor of God, and especially the sword of the Spirit. Our Lord would have his word abide in his disciples. So also the Apostle: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom."* So also in the devotions of the Church: she prays that the words which we have heard with our outward ears may, through grace, be so grafted inwardly in our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruits of good living." Among these fruits, none are of more value than the habitual subordination of ourselves, and all that we are, and all that we have, to the Word of God, as the rightful constitution and law of His moral creation. "The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever. The law of his God is in his heart, therefore none of his steps shall slide."† But mark the next feature in the process of becoming sober-minded, as noted by the Psalmist. "Blessed art thou, O Lord: teach me thy statutes." Here is at once a grateful acknowledgment of God in whatever progress he had made, and a consideration of this progress as ground of humble supplication for new accessions of the same power. And how essential to sober-mindedness is not this peculiar disposition of humility? Without it, the very conquest over passion will but inflate the mind

* Col. iii. 16.

† Ps. xxxvii. 29.

with vain conceit. Whatever considerations, therefore, give importance to the power of God's Word, give importance also to humility on our part under every achievement of this power. That very disposition of mind which inwardly blesses the Lord, is the same which renders unto the Lord the glory due to his name, and supplicates continual help for its own defence. Surely, this is to rejoice in the Lord alway. It is to quiet the soul in God. It is to cherish the filial confidence, that the Providence hitherto exerted in our deliverance from an unhallowed domination, so far from being withdrawn, will be increasingly manifested in our soul's behalf. Lastly, the Psalmist tells the young men of the means employed by him to keep himself in the love of God; how he professed with his lips the faith of his heart, and aimed to delight himself in the ways of God, as in all manner of riches, communing with God in all the appointments of His grace, and seasoning his own heart with more determined devotedness to His service. Now, these are inspired counsels, illustrated in the lives of young men in every age of the Church. This is the way in which many a youth has patiently sought and ultimately found a happy deliverance from the tyranny of natural passion, and attained to Christian sober-mindedness. You need no monastic vows, no rash determinations in the presuming confidence of a self-will. You need wholeheartedness in the search of God—the submission of your hearts to the power of His Word. You need humility under all the conquests achieved by this power. You need to keep yourselves in the love of God, to delight yourselves in his ways. You need to commune with God in all the appointments of His

grace, and to season your hearts with broader and holier determinations to serve and to please God.

Let us now apply the Apostolic charge of the text. "Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded." The first motive we shall present to the culture of sober-mindedness is the authority of Inspiration which enjoins it. This is no arbitrary injunction. It is the dictate of Heavenly wisdom, which appreciates the importance of this period of life and its bearings on every other. From the want of serious attention to the culture of this solid virtue, under what misrule of passion has not many an interesting youth been betrayed? The very period of life allotted by inspired counsel to the especial remembrance of God, and to the formation, under His holy fear, of habits of mental sobriety, so favorable to the development of a quick understanding and of a new heart, has been prostituted, in base servility, to the most ignoble pursuits. And where, under these circumstances, is that reverential regard for the Author of our existence which Inspiration demands, and which so well becomes those who are now entering on their probationary term? Where is the sentiment of grateful acknowledgment to God for an existence capable of glory, honor, and immortality, and furnished with the light and means essential to their attainment? And see we no motive, in our Creator's claims upon us, that should impel to mental sobriety? But if these claims of Almighty God on the days of our youth, founded in our very existence, are just and worthy in themselves, how has not their strength been immeasurably increased by the provisions of the Gospel? Here, the Redeemer's voice is heard, reviving the soul from spiritual death. Here, a fountain is opened for spiritual defilement; and here,

the spring of that sacred energy which enlightens, invigorates, and sanctifies the soul. And see we no additional motive, in this wonderful exhibition of Divine love and compassion, to bar the incursions of insobriety, and to open the heart to every sentiment and feeling of love to God and gratitude to the Redeemer of our souls? At what period of life, more than in that of youth, can the heart be susceptible of impression from the wisdom and moral beauty of the Gospel? When is this impression more likely to be productive in precious fruit? When is this fruit more likely to be realized, in the control of passion, or in the establishment within the soul of every solid virtue by which God can be honored in us?

But the circumstances of the present life are fruitful to young men in motives to sober-mindedness. Consider the influence of this sobriety on character. "Let no man despise thy youth,"* says an Apostle. There are certain invaluable properties of character which operate infallibly as a security against contempt. The history of many an interesting youth has made too plain, that the victim of unrestrained passion must become first an object of indifference, then of contempt. Nor has he a right to complain. His course of life is an insult to society, and when habitually offered, is justly met with the retributive sentiments of indifference and contempt. The cover of family name, or the partiality of friends, or the interests which may have become interwoven with his person, may be employed to give him countenance and support; but upon these he must stand, if he stand at all—a pensioner upon the bounty of others. But the injunction we have

* 1 Tim. iv. 12.

quoted from the Apostle to Timothy, supposes that a young man, independently of family name, partiality of friends, or considerations of interest, may command the respect of the society of which he is a member. Sober-mindedness shall be to him as gray hairs, and an unspotted life as old age; and these, in any condition of life, may justly command respect, and as certainly will receive it from the wise and the good. And surely this should operate with young men as a motive to sobriety. What can be more ignoble in a youth, than to live a pensioner on those around him for the respect he receives? On the contrary, what adornment can glow upon the brow of youth with more imperishable lustre, than force of character, acknowledged and venerated by all, save, perchance, by some whose very reverence for character, through a corrupt heart, is made the occasion of dislike?

Another strong motive to sober-mindedness in youth, is the grateful return it makes to parental assiduity and toil. "A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother."* And, indeed, if young men would seriously reflect for a moment, they would find it difficult to conceive an earthly motive to mental sobriety nobler or more generous than is here suggested by Solomon. Young men are peculiarly the objects of a father's solicitude. The father contemplates in his son the representative of himself passing into another generation, while he himself is gradually subsiding into the grave. He contemplates an object on whom the sweat of his brow has been expended, to whom he may securely commit the burden of earthly concern, from which his

* Prov. x. 1.

own release must soon be effected. "Thou Solomon, my son," said David, when his own days were full, and himself about to launch forth on a shoreless eternity—"Thou Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind."* In this sacred knowledge and service on the part of the son, was the father's security that every subordinate object dear to his heart would be known also, and every consecrated interest from which he was now to be severed, would be served also. And O! who but a father, in the closing scene of life, can realize the comfort and support of this consideration! From what distressing apprehension is not his mind thereby precluded! With what additional serenity can he now unfurl for Eternity, when he feels himself so honorably and so securely represented, within and without, in all the earthly aspects of his being! On the contrary; when, in the earthly pillar of his hope, he contemplates the sad misrule of insobriety; when distrust is awakened; when, in the last flickerings of life, he surveys the assembled group over whom his protective foliage had so long hung, and is gladdened by no representative qualification in one to whom he might so reasonably look;—but we need not dwell on this scene. There is a partner in these pangs, of whom Solomon affirms depression of heart, as she beholds in her son the cheerless wreck of insobriety. And why should this heaviness ever be hers? What interests in heaven or on earth are to be thereby served? what valued end promoted? Or is it so, that the eyes of a mother shall be wantonly filled with tears and her heart made to droop beneath the burden of its grief?

* 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

“Exhort young men likewise to be sober-minded.” Surely, if no other motive could be urged,—if on no other ground sobriety of mind and heart and habit of life could be enjoined,—here is a motive, here is ground which heaven and earth have combined to create.

Finally. Let no young man be misled by the delusive thought, that a time more convenient than the present will come round, when the natural passions, feelings and affections, may be subjugated with less difficulty, or sober-mindedness superinduced with more ease. These sad fruits of apostacy lose nothing of their cogency while permitted to rove in their licentiousness. Single acts of irregular indulgence mature themselves into habits, and habits ripen into a second nature, rivalled only in its indelible character by the spots of the leopard and the hue of an Ethiopian. The difficulty with many young men, even at their period of life, is not so much in the force of undisciplined passion, as in the habit of indulging in its insatiable demands. And mark, if at your period of life you are now indisposed to Christian sobriety, what have you to expect when the habit of indulgence now forming has arrived at a dark and sullen maturity? “If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, how then shalt thou contend with horses?”*

Let me then exhort you, by these motives, to seasonable sobriety before the evil day comes. And for the same reason that sober-mindedness is essential to your well-being in both worlds, is it essential also, that in the culture and maturing of this solid virtue you should be guided by the heavenly wisdom to which we have referred. Seek the Lord with your

* Jer. xii. 5.

whole heart. You shall then find Him. His word will become a power lodged within your own soul. It will both achieve victories in your behalf and humble you under these achievements. Your pathway will shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. And when it shall please God to call you hence, and to release your spiritual frame from the yoke of Christ, the everlasting doors will be opened for your admission,—your own shall be added to the songs of the redeemed to the Redeemer's glory, who loved you and who gave himself for you, and under whose Spirit you are now exhorted to be sober-minded.



SERMON LIII.

PRIVATE WITNESSING FOR CHRIST.

“ And it came to pass, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while the Lord talked with him.”—*Ex. xxxiv. 29.*

THE topic of discourse suggested by these words was recently discussed, with reference chiefly to the correction of two capital errors in religion; we mean the error of those who hide their religious impressions from the world around them; glimmer separately; make no open profession of their faith; but cherish rather the secrecy, which they conceive to be countenanced, if not enjoined, by certain Scripture warrants. We showed how this error derived its countenance and support from a broken Scripture, while it overlooked not only large tracts of other Scripture, which enjoin an open

profession, but also one important use and design of the Christian Church. We then showed, that the Christian Church, in its application to ourselves, was the identical link required, in order to harmonize into one grand whole these seemingly discordant Scriptures. The required openness before the world is that of a body corporate—the required privacy is that of the constituent members of this body. That, as individuals, we publicly witnessed for Christ through the Church, publicly worshipped God through the same body, publicly confessed our sins, publicly celebrated the memorial Christ hath commanded us to make, publicly contributed to the support of the Gospel, and to the comfort of Christ in the persons of the afflicted and the poor. Thus, while the required privacy in religion becomes our own, we, at the same time, and as the body corporate of Christ, are made the light of the world, a city that is set on a hill.* We may perceive, from the text, how unconscious and modest was Moses in his private character, while, in his public and representative character, his countenance shone as a light in the world, and exercised a powerful influence on the minds of those around him. It is observable, also, that the privacy in religion, enjoined by our Lord, is addressed to the individual disciple or “member in particular.” “But, when *thou* doest alms, † let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.” “But *thou*, when thou prayest.” “But *thou*, when thou fastest.” But when these disciples are addressed corporately, as a Church, the injunctions to openness of religious character take a collective form. “Ye are the light of the world;” ‡ and they are compared together to a city;

* Matt. v. 14.

† Matt. vi., &c.

‡ Matt. v. 14.

and their openness before the world, to a city set on an hill. The little glimmering which we afford as individual Christians would be lost upon the world, as if men should light a candle and set it under a bushel; but when we combine these separate glimmerings, and set the light thus created on the candlestick—that is, within the Church, which for this end Christ has instituted and ordained—then, as the history of the Church shows, it giveth light unto all that are in the house—the world around is enlightened, and savingly affected thereby.

The opposite error we endeavored to correct concerns those who, not content with this openness of the religious profession which our Lord contemplates, and which is sheltered under the authority of his Church, run into religious ostentation and display. They either become irregular while within the pale of the Church, introducing a spirit and practice unknown to her usage, or at variance with it, or they apostatize from the Church, as if in contempt of her authority and office; publicly witness for Christ on their own foundations, in their own wisdom, in their own spirit of self-elation, and through their own institutions. We lamented that the secularity which, in so many instances, has encroached and grown on the Christian profession, should have given occasion and show of justification to these melancholy defections. Many serious and zealously affected, but uninformed minds, have found it distressingly doubtful, how far they were at liberty to merge the superior brightness of the skin of their own face in a general body of such ambiguous complexion. They forsake the guide of their youth, and misconceiving the glare of some passing meteor for the clearness of the sun, they surrender their best interests to the

counsels which cause them to err from the words of knowledge. We remarked, that admitting, in behalf of these misguided persons, what they so confidently assume, we mean their own superiority ; yet one thing, which they overlook, is sufficiently clear—that what is affirmed of Moses, in our text, can never be reconciled with the spirit they evince. “He wist not that the skin of his face shone while the Lord talked with him.” The unconsciousness and modesty of Moses, combined as were these graces with the credentials of close communion with God which irradiated his face, can never adorn the profession where this error prevails. Rudeness of spirit will become confounded in the mind with witnessing for Christ. Nurseries of self-contemplation will be appreciated as sources of spiritual edification. The essential simplicity and godly sincerity of the Christian character will be overborne and exterminated by an infinite variety of little guiles and petty hypocrisies, aiming for religious effect. High profession, on individual responsibility, will be exhibited, from which the sober-minded have always shrunk. Then will be had a distastefulness for forms of sound words ; vociferation in devotional engagements ; self-elation ; artificial earnestness ; an exposure of their hearts and minds to innumerable minor evils and snares, which, by certain laws, must beset those who, in the wisdom of their own conceit, build on insecure foundations through ways and means of their own. From a consideration of these opposite errors in religion, we inferred the nature and character of the Christian profession, as symbolized in the pattern exhibited in our text. First, close intercourse and communion with God ; secondly, conformity to the plain pathway of the Church ; thirdly, a light, tributary to the glory of the Church, as the

one public and authoritative witness for Christ; and, lastly, unconsciousness and modesty, in respect of its own intrinsic worth or influence on those around.

In conclusion, we remarked, that although we need be informed of the nature and operation of these two capital errors in religion, yet the error most prevalent among ourselves was of intermediate character: the professing to witness for Christ through the good confession of the Church, and yet not meeting our Church obligations of duty. "Why call ye me Lord, Lord," complained the Saviour of the Body, "and do not the things which I command you?"* This is now the standing complaint of the Church, which is the Body of Christ.

We boast ourselves, saying—The Church of Christ, the Church of Christ, the Church of Christ, are we; while, at the same time, we are habitually negligent and remiss in the observance of what the Church enjoins—as essential to her own character, and the end of her appointment, as the public witness for Christ. The evil arising from this prevalent inconsistency, is clearly unfolded by the Prophet in his reproof of Israel. "Behold," says he, "ye trust in lying words that cannot profit."† And mark how he warns against this dangerous delusion. "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord are these."‡ Thus saith the Lord God, "Amend your ways and your doings." Now this inspired reproof is exceedingly monitory, and should be religiously regarded. It involves this principle; that where the public profession, which, as members in particular, we

* Luke vi. 46.

† Jer. vii. 8.

‡ Jer. vii. 4.

merge in the good confession of the Church, is not sustained by conformity to the spirit and requirements of the Church—then the profession itself degenerates into false and delusive ground of hope. We share in the delusion of those who “trust in lying words which cannot profit.” That which is true in itself and approved of God, is, in virtue of our disobedience, made false to us, and deceptive as a ground of trust. And we are admonished not to trust in the character we thus presumptuously assume, as it will be sure to fail us in the time of need; but rather to repent of our past negligence and remissness, and amend our ways and our doings. “Ye are the body of Christ,” says an Apostle, “and members in particular,”* which shows that whether in our collective and public, or in our individual and private character, as a Christian people, we have duties to perform, testimonies to bear, a God to glorify, a Redeemer to honor, the Church to strengthen, her hands to hold up, our place to fill, and our fidelity to adorn with lowly virtue—that, with the residue of Christ’s holy Church, we may be blessed with a part in the first resurrection, and share in her eternal felicity and triumph. We now purpose to say something of the nature and kinds of private witnessing for Christ, which pertain to our Christian calling. When we say “private witnessing for Christ,” we mean the attestation we afford, not in our collective capacity as the body of Christ, but rather as “members in particular.”

The nature of this private witnessing may be inferred from its alliance in kind though not in degree, with that which, in our corporate capacity, we make before

* 1 Cor. xii. 27.

the world. Has the Church been separated from the world? Is it said that the Spirit of God dwelleth in her; is she thus sanctified in character, and illuminated and quickened for the Master's use? Is she made to shine as a light in the world, and to exercise a benign and persuasive influence on the world? Then surely, to say the least, some glimmerings of these excellent offices should be manifest in us as "members in particular." As the Church is separate from the world—yet in the world—so is every member in particular. What meaneth God's calling of men by name in his recorded communication with them, saying, even to a child, "Samuel; Samuel?" What meaneth the calling of children by name, in the divine communication with them, in their Christian baptism? But wherever a consecrated individuality may exist, there is a sphere assigned it, as the Apostle expresses it. "No man liveth unto himself."* But where a sphere is assigned a Christian man, there persuasive influence will be exercised, and felt more or less by those around him. This influence, indeed, may be repelled. It may meet with derision and contempt. But in itself, it is a sweet savor of God, and felt it will be, either profitably unto life, or fatally unto death. Again, are we assured by an Apostle that the Spirit of God dwelleth in the temple of God; that is, within the Church—the mystical body of Christ; and if so, has the member in particular no share in this divine inhabitation? has he no personal sanctification from this divine source, no quickening, no power, no influence on those around him? Most certainly, in his measure he is thus qualified, and in his place ordained to be a witness for God. Why

* Rom. xiv. 7.

the whole Christian man, through the Spirit, is a living testimony. You may read the witness for Christ, in the manner of his life at home and abroad, in the care of his dependencies, in the kind and degree of his needed recreations. You may discover this witnessing for Christ in the moderation of his joys and sorrows, in his opinions, in his tastes, in his studies, in his views and principles. This member in particular is within the little sphere assigned him, but a miniature form of the general body. He constitutes an element of the Church in the personality of his own being. His glimmering light is set of God on its appropriate candlestick, and it giveth light to all within his sphere. Now mark the nature and kind of this private witnessing for Christ. For it is qualified by the circumstance of age, character, and station. In the first place, the separateness of this man, in many important respects, from the world around him, is so far a witnessing for Christ. He is absent, where a heedless multitude, if not unlawfully present are at least unprofitably so, if not dangerously to their souls. This personal absence, on many an occasion in popular favor, though seemingly of a negative character, is in itself a witnessing for Christ; and such testimony has had a saving influence on thousands. When professing Christians mingle blindly with the votaries of this world—and this, too, at times not allowed by the Prayer-Book, they at first, and until hardened in their inconsistencies, are pursued by some misgivings.

Their position, in reality, is false to their sacred calling, and they suspect it to be so. Hence, with no little solicitude, they look round to gather, if they can, from the presence of others, under like Christian obligations with themselves, some countenance and sanc-

tion of their own delinquency. How lamentable, then, the thought, especially to Christians of reputation, of being at any time made subservient to the cheer and countenance of these careless, pleasure-loving, half-hearted, half-converted namers of Christ. But they look round in vain for this consistent "member in particular." In their indulged worldliness, thanks be to God, they can gather no countenance from his presence, or from her presence. They are left with the heedless votaries of a world which they themselves had renounced. Surely, as Christians, we must be held of God responsible for our personal presence. In itself, it is a witness either for or against Christ; and the witnessing it affords either way, whether in behalf of Christ and his Church, or in counter-influence to both, is often powerful and effective. But let us be assured. We cannot serve these two masters by our personal presence. The Church is the mystical body of Christ, and can have no concord with this world in its distinctive aversion from God, and devotedness to dissipating pleasure. But if such be the case, where have the "members in particular" obtained their license to frequent ball-rooms, theatres, bar-rooms, or to witness public spectacles, which must necessarily involve the violated modesty, if not the ultimate ruin of one sex, and the sacrifice of all that is manly in the other? Now, such is the present constitution of things, that Christians, in virtue of their lawful business engagements, must necessarily be thrown at times into promiscuous association. They are compelled to hear much which they would not wish to hear, and to see much from which they would fain have their eyes averted. What is the witnessing for Christ in such cases?

As a general rule, where the position is not false,

and of this we should be well assured ; a marked silence with its natural sedateness of aspect, however unconsciously assumed, combines within itself the required gentleness towards all men, and a reproof sufficiently intelligible. Silence, therefore, with sedateness, on many occasions of dereliction from Christian propriety of common occurrence, is in itself a witnessing for Christ. So also is the turning away of the eyes from an obtruding vanity, which would seem to solicit our admiration. So are many instinctive indications of disapprobation, however unconsciously afforded, of what at the time may be said by some one or done amiss. It is often sufficient that the unseemliness we meet with, such as speaking evil of others, or vindictiveness of procedure, receive no countenance on our part or sign of concurrence. Circumstances, moreover, may justify a withdrawal of ourselves from others. Such withdrawal of one's personal presence, when its continuance would be false to our profession, is a witnessing for Christ. Neither should this withdrawal be palliated or accounted for on any fictitious grounds, or in any wise explained. It is sufficient that our individual testimony is thereby borne, leaving the offender to divine the cause from his own misgivings.

One remark will equally apply to these private witnessings for Christ under every form. They are religiously private in their nature, as they pertain to ourselves considered only as "members in particular" of the body of Christ. They are not the fit topics of communication with others. As well might Moses have vainly communicated with others on the brightness of his own face. We are told "that he wist not that the skin of his face shone."

There is a higher order of private witnessing for

Christ, which more especially pertains to the Christian proprieties of men of age, or men of established character or reputation for wisdom. This is what the Scriptures term "*rebuke*." It is reasonably to be expected that such men should pass judgment, as in duty they are bound to do, on any glaring delinquency in the events of the day or in the measures of public men. There is a time to speak out, and the only limitation to be observed is, that what is affirmed be worthy, in its spirit and manner, of the obligation implied in boldly witnessing for Christ. Such witnessing may be assailed by others, and even publicly by a dissolute press. But no "member in particular" should be intimidated by that which the Church, as a public witness, has so often endured. What is here affirmable of the proprieties of age, place in society, or reputation for wisdom, devolves on ministers of the gospel in virtue of office. It is a function of their office to rebuke publicly, if need be; and this with all authority, as moral governors, being held responsible to God only for the due execution of their office. They are representatives of the general body; what the Church witnesses at all, she witnesses through them. Their jurisdiction is commensurate with her own. All that may concern the truth as it is in Jesus, either directly or indirectly, comes within their cognizance,—and, if need be, may be publicly passed on and as openly rebuked,—whether connected with men or their measures. Hence the Church, in a world like this, is no welcome prophet. Men of high degree may influence and control their inferiors, but here is a function to which they themselves are subjected. They, indeed, may repudiate, repel, assail, ridicule, defame; but the rebuke of autho-

urity is "a hook within their nostrils,"* and will hold them to the Judgment Day. It is the interest of all, that this function, from which public rebuke proceeds with authority, should be as publicly sustained, and justified in its wise and equitable decisions. It is one divinely-appointed guardian of the public weal, and has proved effective for this end when all other resources have failed. But as no man, of himself, is competent thus to witness for Christ, so the prayers of Christians should be, that their ministers may have grace and power "to speak boldly as they ought to speak."†

To conclude. There is one simple, but, as Scripture and experience prove, most effective mode of witnessing for Christ, which ought not to be left unnoticed. We mean a word dropped in season. We drop it in the name of a disciple—we pass on—we forget it. But in how many instances has it proved a good seed in a kindly soil! A little maid, it is said, who was brought away a captive from the land of Israel into Syria, waited on Naaman's wife. Naaman himself, under the disease of leprosy, was hastening to the grave. In full and unaffected sympathy with the distress of her mistress, and of the servants which waited with her, she gave vent in pious words to a wish which had swollen her heart. It was a witnessing for God, among a heathen people in an idolatrous land. It proved a word in season. We know the result. "The Lord God," saith the Prophet, "hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary."‡ Solomon compares this fitly-spoken word to apples of gold in pictures of silver.§

* Is. xxxvii. 29.

† Eph. vi. 20.

‡ Is. l. 4.

§ Prov. xxv. 11.

It goes home to the heart of one prepared to receive it, and, under God, is often more effective than the most learned and convincing discourse.

Let us, in humble dependence on God, endeavor to improve the suggestions which His Word has here furnished. As we publicly profess through the Church, let us evince a growing conformity to her requirements,—keeping in view her daily prayers; her special prayer-day on Wednesday, when her Lord was condemned; her fast-day on Friday, when he was crucified; her grand commemorative festivals and fasts; her commemorative saints' days, in behalf of those who labored in her foundations, and there suffered and died, seeing nothing of that stupendous fabric which, under God, has since been reared.

Nor let us be unmindful of private witnessing for Christ as “members in particular.” Let us hold ourselves responsible to God, for our personal presence, for the keeping of our lips, for the opening of our mouths, for the turning away of our eyes, for an abrupt withdrawal of ourselves—in no display, indeed, nor affectation of a closeness with God to which we have not attained, but in culture and under the inspiration of that sacred closeness.

May God, in infinite mercy, inspire our hearts and aid our feeble endeavors to serve him better. Soon will cease the day allotted to toil and self-denial, when the heavens shall be opened, and we shall see Jesus who was crucified in witnessing a good confession; and the holy men who, in suffering, fidelity, and in the patience of Christ, testified the Gospel of the Grace of God; and a bright, shining array of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God. May we be individually counted worthy to

swell that blessed number of witnesses, and to find our perfect consummation and bliss in the eternal and everlasting Kingdom.



SERMON LIV.

[PREACHED ON THE SUNDAY FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF A VENERABLE COMMUNICANT, 1846.]

LIFE UNDER THE GOSPEL NEITHER CLEAR NOR DARK.

“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear nor dark: but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.”—Zech. xiv. 6, 7.

SINCE our last assembling in this place for public worship, and for showing forth sacramentally the Lord's death, it has pleased Almighty God, in His wise providence, to take out of this world the soul of a venerable brother. The number of his days was full,—exceeding the ordinary term assigned to mortals,—and it is this circumstance which makes the duration of his life singularly instructive when contemplated through the medium of our text.

Such instances of prolonged lifetime are at this day of comparatively rare occurrence. In by far the larger number of cases among us, the term of probation is cut short, either in the morning or at noonday—at most, but a few stages beyond the meridian of life. The silver cord is loosed, rather than exhausted,—the golden bowl is broken, rather than worn out by attrition,—the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. The picture these exhibit of human life

is imperfect, and consequently not satisfactory to a studious observer. We sometimes mourn departed friends, to whose short probationary term changes and mixtures were unknown. The golden bowl had broken ere the evil days had come. These days were unknown to them, or known only as reverse changes in the life-term of others. They themselves had lived under a halcyon incubation,—in the enjoyment of unruptured serenity,—inhaling only the balmy inspiration of the spring-time of life. Strangers to the vicissitudes which have marked the allotment of others, they had been caught up from the evil to come into a kindlier region, there to expand and mature under a far more felicitous climate than earth could afford. In other cases of broken and consequently of incomplete illustrations of human life, its subjects have enjoyed no calm, no sunshine, no exhilaration of soul. They were born under a tempestuous sign, were rocked under clouds, and amidst storms. As they advanced into life, they were met by a succession of sorrows,—one deep had called another,—they toiled—they sighed—they wept; but ere the night had buried its sorrow or the morning dawned forth its joy, the silver cord had loosed, the golden bowl had been shattered, their spirits had been ushered into a region where there is no night, no stormy atmosphere,—at our approach to which sorrow and sighing flee away, and God himself awaits to wipe away all tears from our eyes. Neither of these cases of broken allotment, however unlike to each other, affords in itself a fair exponent of the Christian life, as exhibited in our text and illustrated in the full-dayed term of our departed friend. In one respect, indeed, they are alike. They are but segments of a circle, which in its complete circumference comprehends every

diversified form and shade of vicissitude. To judge of the Christian life by the fallacious rule of a mere segment of that life, would be to take impressions of the whole year from the verdure of Spring or the vigor of Summer, or from the decayed tinge of Autumn or the ravage of Winter. To be rightly regarded, the Christian life must be seen as in our text,—as a whole,—at best, a mixed state in itself, yet but one well-defined course of providence and grace.

Besides the two opposite cases to which we have referred, there is yet a third aspect of incomplete allotment, which has but tasted of the vicissitudes of life, having been met by death, and taken away both from the higher prosperity which hung ever its earthly destinies, and from the precipitous falls or gradual decline from that prosperity which, in due course, must have eventuated. Were we permitted to choose for ourselves a condition of life, we might be strongly disposed to accept the choice of Agur. We should say with him, “give me neither poverty nor riches ;* give me neither all knowledge, nor depressing ignorance ; give me neither blight in the spring-time of life, nor yet an old age tottering under the burden of its infirmities.

With our departed friend, his course of providence and grace was but one day known unto the Lord ; but as it rolled over his earthly existence it unfolded, now for his enjoyment, now for his depression, now for his joy and comfort, now for his grief and humiliation, all the ordinary vicissitudes, both temporal and spiritual, which pertain to this mortal life. It was with him neither clear nor dark ; not day, nor night ; but so it came to pass, that

* Prov. xxx. 8.

at the evening time it was light. Probably to the last moment of his existence, certainly so far as they were within observation, his faculties, however abated in vigor, remained entire; his vision of death, through the Redeemer, in whom he believed, was devout and tranquil. He gradually sunk and gently expired, as a calm expanse of being over which the Divine Comforter had breathed, ere it had passed away into the eternal ocean of love. And now that venerable form, so familiar to our eyes within these walls,—which we have so often beheld either affected with godly sorrow, or quickened in devotion, or heightened in gratitude and love, we shall see no more. That tremulous voice, which had long united with our own in responsive worship, is silenced in death. That hand, so often extended to take the bread which our priesthood had broken, and the cup which our priesthood had blessed, lies palsied in the grave. Our venerable Father is no more; but the inspiration in our text remains to depict, and to the end of time, the Gospel day, the present state of the Church, and consequently the state of each individual member, who, like unto the Church, is destined to receive a full complement of days, with a due mixture of enjoyment and of suffering; of comfort and of mourning; of uprisings and of downfallings; of sin and of holiness; embracing within these vicissitudes one course of Divine providence and grace, terminating in light and life eternal. Let us proceed, then, to consider more particularly the condition of the Christian life, as portrayed in our text, with such improvement as our limits may permit. “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear nor dark;” as it is again expressed, “it shall be not day, nor night.” To drop the figurative terms, the sense would seem to be *this*;

that however elevated under the Gospel dispensation, the spiritual condition of the Church and of its members would be but imperfectly good. Evil would be present with her. It thus appears that mixture and change are in the earthly portion of God's people. Neither our knowledge, nor our inward comfort, nor our holiness, nor our realizations in any form of spiritual prosperity, though infinitely raised by the diffusion of the Gospel, and the reception of its grace within our hearts, will compare with those properties in the least of the servants of God, whose spirits, through the gate of death, have entered the invisible department of the kingdom. On all those points, the feeblest of those who have died in the Lord are infinitely blessed beyond us who remain. They are infinitely our superiors, and their superiority may be chiefly ascribed to the release of the soul from the body. In our case the vile, corruptible body, presses like an incubus on all that is spiritual within us. In the case of the departed servant of God, the body has been dropped. The spirit has escaped like a bird from the snare. The snare is broken and she is delivered. "The light shall not be clear nor dark." Consider this light in the sense of knowledge. That through the light of the blessed Gospel we have been illuminated in part, and infinitely beyond the less favored portions of our race, it were ingratitude and impiety to deny.

But even under the most eminent attainments in spiritual science, how inconsiderable now is the advance! Our light is neither clear nor dark. We see through a glass darkly. Humiliating, indeed, is the thought that the highest excellence in spiritual knowledge of which we are here capable is the conviction, that as yet we know nothing as we ought to know.

We profess belief in the Holy Father, in the eternal Son, in the Spirit of truth, in the paradise of God, in the resurrection of the body, in judgment and eternity. But how limited is our knowledge of the sacred Persons and things to which we refer ! We know something, indeed, for inspiration has taught us something. Doubtless, for present wisdom, enough for man to know. But how vastly disproportioned is our knowledge of spiritual realities, to the realities themselves ! Think, for instance, of the Son of God, of the brightness of His glory, the tenderness of His love, the riches of His grace, the depth of His condescension, the height of His greatness. How little do we know of, how little can we penetrate into, these holy mysteries ! Nor need we wonder at our partial knowledge of these high spiritualities. For who can know even the heart which he carries within him ? When has its desperate wickedness been fathomed, or its exceeding deceitfulness explored ? We know enough of it indeed to make us tremble, for inspiration has taught us something. But how little do we know. The Christian, indeed, sees enough of it to beware of its instinctive emotions. He has been made to flee from himself ; to renounce all allegiance to that interior misrule ; to dread its secret plots more than all the outward deceits of the world, or the manifest tokens of the Evil One. His prayer is to be delivered, if from no other evil, yet from an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

Light, then, considered as spiritual knowledge, is in this present state neither clear nor dark, not day nor night. We know but in part only, and we but prophesy in part. We dare not lean to our own understanding. We choose rather to cry out with the

Psalmist, "Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death."*

Again: If we consider light in the sense of comfort of soul, it is found, in this present state, to be neither clear nor dark. It were indeed ingratitude to affirm, that our souls have not been refreshed with Divine consolations. God has provided comfort for his people. The Holy Spirit has come—the Comforter of all who by him are led through manifold tribulations to their inheritance beyond the grave. But what strange vicissitudes, in this respect, do not the people of God encounter! What contrariety in the spiritual frame is not portrayed in the Psalms of David! One while, he seems to have found a hidden treasure; then, again, to have lost even more than he had found. In the morning, he is contented and happy; at noon, of all men he would seem to be most miserable. We do not say that this fluctuation of the spiritual frame is equally marked in every case,—the depression of the religious affections at one time will probably be proportioned to their measure of elevation at another,—but this much we may confidently affirm, that every Christian, of any considerable experience in the life which he now lives, will be constrained to admit that his light, in the sense of consolation and good cheer, is neither clear nor dark. He can enter understandingly into all that contrariety of feeling and affection which the Scriptures record. When he hears David exclaim, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom then shall I fear?"† he understands him. When he hears an Apostle exclaim, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?"‡ he understands him. In either case, whether

* Ps. xiii. 3.

† Ps. xxvii. 1.

‡ Rom. vii. 24.

of spiritual comfort or of depression, he has within the compass of his own vicissitudes a testimony peculiar to himself.

Again: If we look into their providential fortunes, we shall find among the people of God the same evidence of mixture and change. "Thou hast lifted me up and cast me down," is the universal sentiment of the Church. If, in one hour, we have attuned our harps to songs of mercy, in another we have hung those harps upon the willows, that we might sit down and weep under the shadows of sorrow. And these changes are often inexplicable to ourselves. By no rule of our own can we discover what God, within the workings of His providence, is doing with us. We read of Joseph in prison, while the iron entered into his soul; of David dethroned, and of Israel in trouble. Well might Daniel have exclaimed, while being cast into the den of lions, What doest thou, O my God, whom I have served continually? We know the changes through which we ourselves have passed, but we know not those which are in reserve for us while the silver cord is yet unloosed, or the wheel at the cistern yet unbroken. But a partial revolution of that mysterious wheel may write that man childless who is now surrounded with smiling beatitudes. It may write another higher in the world than even his buoyant hopes ever rose, and again it may place him *lower* than his darkest fears had ever boded. So perplexing, often, are God's doings, so obscure His purposes, that we cannot understand them. "His way is in the sea, and His path in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known."

Now, if it be inquired from whence these fluctuations of life, these vicissitudes in the circumstances of

our earthly condition, we may answer, they arise by certain laws, from waverings in another quarter. The light, considered as our *holiness*, is neither clear nor dark. Mixture and change in this respect also, while in this present state, are common to all the people of God. Whatever may be affirmed of the justification of a pardoned sinner, his sanctification through the Spirit is but in progress, is at all times impeded, and is often on the decline. Faith is always in conflict with unbelief,—the love of Christ with the love of the world. It is but too common with us to bend our faith and love to our earthly convenience or affection; but God, in whom we trust and on whose wisdom we rely, works within us and for us by a contrary rule. He bends or breaks all that is earthly in our delight to our best, because eternal, welfare. We are emptied by His providence from vessel to vessel; and His concern it is, that in every change, whether from good to evil, or from evil to good, our souls shall eventually be gainers thereby. As He diversifies our state, and pours our condition out from vessel to vessel, something of feculence is separated from our spiritual substance, in a way which at first, indeed, we may not be able to discern, but which afterward, when we are rightly exercised thereby, will manifestly appear. The true servant of God, in all the changes of life, whether from joy to trouble, or from trouble to joy, is improved in holiness. Were we perfectly unholy, we should have neither part nor lot in this merciful economy. Were we perfectly holy, we should be fixed in our happiness, both in state, in feeling, and affection. But while, in this life, our sanctification is neither clear nor dark, it is neither day nor night; it is contaminated with sin, and this is the fruitful source of all other changes which

distinguish our allotment here. These changes, under God, who maketh all things work together for good to them that love him, bring out into holy exercise those graces of the Spirit which might not otherwise have appeared. They make us realize our weakness, our blindness, our insufficiency; while, under the Spirit, they train the soul into a more simple dependence on the grace and strength of her Redeemer. These are very comforting views of the mixed condition which here enters into our portion, but the consolation will gather power when we consider what is further asserted in our text,—that diversified in light and shade as is our earthly condition, whether spiritually or otherwise regarded, it is, in respect of God, but one day, and known unto Him. “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear nor dark; but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord.” By the figurative term, “*one day*,” we may understand one course of Providence in the things of Providence, and one course of Grace in the things of Grace. No violence, indeed, would be done, were we to combine in one view all that pertains to Providence and Grace, for Providence is but a handmaid of Grace. By “*one day*,” therefore, we shall better understand one course of Providence and Grace. And what a consolation to God’s people to be thus assured, that however diversified their state in this world, and mixed in its general aspect, it is with the Lord as but the course of one day. And, in respect of His knowledge, it is a bright and felicitous day, however clouded, and at times dark, it may appear to us. For the darkness, says David, is no darkness with Thee, but the night is as clear as the day; the darkness and light to Thee are both

alike.* We ourselves, indeed, are often perplexed, and sometimes may be tempted almost to despair; but there is nothing ambiguous, much less inscrutable, with God in the way in which His Spirit hath led us. We cannot know *His* way, but He knoweth the way, says Job, I take; † when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

“But it shall be *one day* known unto the Lord.” O yes! That complete term of life allotted to our departed friend, embracing more than fourscore years, with all its portion of mixture and change, and under some aspects of which he was doubtless troubled on every side,—now perplexed—now pursued—now cast down,—was, with his Divine Master, but “one day”—one clear, bright day,—and so well known unto Him, that all the incidents of that one day had been foreseen and provided for. Not a sparrow had fallen to the ground without His knowledge and gracious supervision. All those troubles that crossed his path had been mingled with rays of comfort; all those perplexities which distracted his bosom had been irradiated with hope; all those trials had been alleviated in their severity; all those down-castings had served but to reveal a broad hand underneath, able to deliver, mighty to save. Taken as a whole, all things, we may humbly trust, have worked together for his good. This is strong consolation, in all ages, to the people of God; but it stops not here. Our text closes with this Divine assurance, that with whatever of mixture and change that “*one day*” may be distinguished, its evening-time shall be light. This divine assurance to the servant of God, who is here destined to encounter so much both

* Ps. cxxxix. 12.

† Job xxiii. 10.

of outward and spiritual depression, may be considered under two aspects—the one relating to the close of the present state, the other to the dawning of the eternal day which opens upon it. Under the first aspect, the servant of God is assured that his last days shall be his best,—the holiest, the happiest portion of the life which now is. Now, it might have been supposed, that where the day had been clouded throughout, the evening-time would reveal but thick darkness and storms. And, indeed, upon natural principles, even the most devoted of the servants of God, when they reflect on the infidelity which has mingled with their best services, and how much of acknowledged duty has been neglected altogether, and how imperfectly those duties have been performed in which they have professed to engage,—to say nothing of many actual transgressions which have provoked the Divine wrath and indignation against them,—when they reflect on all these things, how justly might they not apprehend an evening of stormy wind and tempest? And mark. It is termed in our text *the evening-time*, and the evening-time of a day which was neither clear nor dark, and therefore an evening-time when, taught by nature, we should least look for light.

Here, then, and under these circumstances, are we assured that light shall spring up. “Unto the godly,” says David, “there ariseth up light in the darkness.”* And what is this light which, under circumstances so cheerless in themselves, has dawned into the soul of that poor, dying, withered servant of God, as he totters on the margin of two worlds? Why, it is the light of a sinner’s comfort and support, the stay of his soul, and

* Ps. cxii 4.

his hope of salvation. It is the light of God in the face of Jesus Christ, who gave himself, the just, for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. It is a manifestation of glory to the soul, suited to the evening tide of a cloudy day, clear and intelligible in its consolation, saying, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."* But if we give to the promise a higher sense, then the closing language of the text may give assurance that the life of God's servant, however checkered in its portion of good and evil, shall eventuate in life everlasting. At evening time it shall be light. "I give unto my sheep," said our Lord, "eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."† And it is this translation of the soul from her tabernacle below to her prepared place in the paradise of God, which, in the eye of faith, gives to the death-bed scene its surpassing interest. In one short hour, and of what tremendous importance to the dying Christian is not the business to be transacted! His soul is to pass from a dark chamber, where the only light suited to her wants was the light of grace, under which she had oftener wept than rejoiced, into a broad manifestation of the Redeemer's glory, as it exists in the world of spirits, there to expand under new and holier visions, and to gather a vast accession of spiritual life, and light, and joy. Happy art thou, O Israel! In thine evening time, it shall be light, and the light of thy Redeemer shall be the present peace and eternal joy of thy soul! And O, if under the stirring emotion

* Is. xli. 10.

† John x. 28.

of some felicitous hour, David would rehearse the chief deliverances in his soul's behalf which God had achieved, what may not be the emotions of a departed spirit—what may not be those of our venerable brother in the communion of Saints, when first realizing his portion among the spirits of the just! How heavenly now his aspect! How holy, how happy! We seem to hear him exclaim, O, come hither and hearken, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul.* I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me, and heard my calling. He brought me out of the horrible pit, out of the mire and clay, and set my feet upon the rock, and ordered my goings, and He hath put a new song in my mouth, even a thanksgiving unto our God.† But let it ever be remembered, that the people concerned in this promise are penitent and believing sinners—the Redeemer's people, now tempest-tost in their way to heaven, and driven often by adverse winds. Let inquiries be excited into our individual relation to this promise. Let us mark especially, whether changes have been effected within us; whether we are becoming more humble, holier, and happier, under the vicissitudes of life. Do we begin to see as we once saw not, and to reverse the false estimation of persons and things of this world, which in our blindness we had fixed? Do we expect the fiery trials which must befall God's people? Are we daily preparing, under grace, to meet them acceptably to God and savingly to the soul—disentangling our affections from dark works, putting on the armor of light, treasuring up in our hearts the word of Christ, enriching our souls with its wisdom; so that, roll as

* Ps. lxvi. 16.

† Ps. xl. 2.

they may, in storm and tempest, the waves of this troublesome world may only waft us forward to the haven of rest? May that blessed Spirit which sanctifies the whole body of the Church, abide with us individually, and bring us to the enjoyment of eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON LV.

THE GENERAL RESURRECTION.

“Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?”—Acts xxvi. 8.

THE Apostle St. Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ, in the presence of King Agrippa, expostulates with the Court in these words. As God's chosen vessel, he was set for the defence of the Gospel, in an age of gross darkness and inveterate prejudice. Persecuted on all sides, he stands at last, under arrest, before the King; his body in chains, his mind free, his manner dignified, his address respectful, his argument overpowering in its appeal. “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?”

Under cover of this appeal, we purpose to show, that the doctrine of a general resurrection cannot be supposed to transcend belief on the grounds of any impossibility in the event affirmed, nor of any improbability, nor yet on the ground of any deficiency in the highest moral evidence of its certainty. We learn from the Acts of the

Apostles, that the Athenians rejected this doctrine because of its supposed impossibility. The Apostle was counted "a setter forth of strange gods," because he preached unto them "Jesus and the resurrection." Formed as were the minds of these philosophers on uninspired, and, therefore, on inadequate conceptions of the nature and attributes of the Supreme Being, it is said they glorified Him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations and darkened in their foolish hearts. Professing to be wise in things beyond their measure, they conceived a god by the rule and limitation of their own image; a being adjusted to their own taste and fashioned by their own standards. So true is it that the darkening of the human heart will ever keep pace with presumptuous self-illumination in the deep things of God. Now, Revelation, by elevating and enlightening the human mind, relieves it from all embarrassment as to the possibility of a general resurrection. The Divine attributes alone, clearly brought to light, assure us of this much. How exalted, for instance, are not the conceptions afforded us of the Divine omniscience! "Thine eye did see my substance yet being imperfect, and in thy book were all my members written, which day by day were fashioned when as yet there was none of them."* A single volition of the Divine mind scans the amount of atoms originally embarked in universal creation, with the particular amount comprehended in its component parts. The hairs of our heads are all numbered, known intuitively, as by the intervention of numbers we know. He numbers the dust of Jacob. Not an infant of his Church, from the beginning to the end of time, will escape His notice. He

* Ps. cxxxix. 16.

knoweth whereof we are made—nor can one particle of His universal domain be annihilated, or escape His vigilance and control. The possibility of a general resurrection, therefore, can never, on the ground of defect of knowledge in the Divine mind, be reasonably denied. But the Divine omnipotence is commensurate with the attribute we have just considered. Neither can any hindrance to God arise from the peculiar properties of the body. No higher difficulty can possibly occur in the restructure than has been already overcome in the original creation. The dust, out of which Adam became a living soul under the Spirit-breath, must have been at least as far removed from the qualities of organic life as the lifeless dust into which he was stricken under the curse of law. The remark will equally apply to the myriads of bodies which have either mouldered in the quiet grave or melted in the bosom of the heaving waters. Mere numbers, let it be remembered, is a limited idea of our own, but can have no place whatever in the infinite perfections of the Divine mind—a thousand days are as yesterday, in every instance of the myriads that have existed. The power which originates can as easily reorganize. If, when there were no atoms, atoms were created; and if, when there was no man, a body was formed, how much the more easily, when this body has decayed, can its recomposition be effected by Almighty power? As far, therefore, as the mere possibility of the thing is concerned, the two Divine attributes we have considered, expostulate with authority. “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?”

Let us now look into the probability of such an event. Here, while unfolding her analogies, Nature is

kind and persuasive. "That which thou sowest," says an Apostle, "is not quickened except it die."* The body within the seed, as we all know, is not developed until the outward covering wherewith it is clothed undergoes a dissolution of its nature and properties. Then in due time, and in Nature's way, we contemplate an object coming forth, and presently far excelling in beauty and glory all which, antecedently to our experience of these things, could possibly have been imagined by us. But, replies an objector, we have experience of the process of germination, but none of the resurrection of the human body. This we may grant. But the analogy, we consider, concerns not the high moral assurance, but the probability only of such an event. Conceive, then, an individual so situated from infancy upwards, as to have acquired neither experience nor knowledge of the nature and process of vegetable production. Show to this man a bare grain of wheat, or of some other grain. Tell him of its capacity of development, and of the means and process of arriving at its perfection. Describe to him the essential vitality and vigor of its perfect state—its elevation and expansion—its beauty and its fragrance; and we may venture to affirm that such person would occupy precisely the same ground as we ourselves naturally do, in relation to the rising of the dead to life. The degrees of possibility in the two cases by any rule of ours would coincide. The degrees of probability in the one case would measure those in the other. Indeed, as things now are, we have *analogy* on which to rest the probability of a general resurrection. It is afforded in the very econo-

* 1 Cor. xv. 36.

my of nature ; concerning which the individual before supposed could have no analogy whatever. Now the Athenian sage was accustomed to sow his grain, that, from the dissolution of its corruptible clothing, its body might be clothed upon with new and more beautiful apparel. What, indeed, is the standing economy of Nature, but a series of reproduction? Year after year she new clothes her province ; while here and there, in her evergreen, she gives intimation that there is " raiment with God, which waxeth not old." Go abroad at this particular season ; go meditate with Isaac in the fields. See beauty and verdure springing forth from cheerless gloom—from coldness and corruption—now in reviving energy—now in reanimated form ; every where and on all sides round, we see the argument of probability uniting with the expostulation in the text—" Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?" But if the possibility of the resurrection be clear, and its probability by no means obscure, the thing itself will receive additional proof from the Old Testament page. That the ray from this source is comparatively dim, we readily admit. For God, in the Gospel of His Son, had a brighter day in reserve. But still the lesser light is precious in its place, and like the tinge of the East—is but the harbinger of morn. " Now, as touching the resurrection of the dead," said our Lord, " have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying—I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob : God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."*

This is our Lord's argument for the resurrection of

* Matt. xxii. 32.

the dead. It derives its force from that illustrious attribute—the truth of Almighty God. This attribute was pledged to the Fathers for the fulfilment of promise in due time. These holy men, it is said, believed God, and obtained a good report through this faith; yet they died in this faith—not having here inherited the promise.

These circumstances, seemingly, create a dilemma. Either the truth of God, with reverence be it spoken, has failed, or, if it stand for ever, these holy men, though dead to us; are now alive unto God; and in full time must come forth to inherit the reality of good things—in the faith of which they here parted with the living. They went off believing in God's truth. The noble faith of these old worthies is upon record: "By faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promise offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead."*

Mark, too, how, by faith, Joseph "gave commandment concerning his bones."† Hear, too, the chief speaker, when eloquently expressing the sentiments of the Patriarchal Church: "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 eyes shall behold, and not another."‡ It is said God was not ashamed to be called the God of these men.§ They honored him as God. He took them for a people, and proclaimed himself to be their God.

* Heb. xi. 17.

† Heb. xi. 22.

‡ Job xix. 25.

§ Heb. xi. 16.

Let it be remembered—Divine truth was the presiding attribute of their dispensation, and by their faith they vindicated this truth, under all their enduring trials, though often terminating in death. To this ancient testimony of the word the holy Prophets also gave a strong confirmation. “And at that time,” said Daniel, “thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the Book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”* These intimations of a general resurrection from the Old Testament page, like the stars of the firmament, were excellent at their time and in their place. They incited the human mind to higher expectation, and wonderfully softened the gloom which then hung over the grave. This faith soothed many a desponding breast under the severity of its bereavements, and bid sorrow and sighing flee away. In the mean time, as the argument progresses, the appeal gathers force. “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead.”

Let us next look into the high moral certainty of a general resurrection which the bright sun of the Gospel unfolds to our view. “Marvel not at this,” said our Lord; “for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.”†

Now this clear and explicit declaration of our Lord is beyond the need of confirmation from other and concurrent declarations within the sacred Word. But

* Dan. xii. 2.

† John v. 28.

this one remark will universally apply to these declarations, whether they be expressly or incidentally made. They are constituent parts of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, that immovable body of evidence which sustains the whole fabric, sustains each part. Whatever weight of testimony to the credibility of the Gospel may be derived from prophecy fulfilled and now fulfilling; from the stupendous miracles wrought by our Lord; from the peculiar circumstances of the early propagation of the Gospel; from the fruits of the Gospel thus far developed, and now apparent to ourselves—this no less attests the truth and credibility of our doctrine, and unites with authority in the appeal of our text. But this high moral certainty, so strongly assured, receives its crowning force from the event we commemorate to-day. We mean the glorious resurrection of our Lord from the dead. The evidence of this fact comprises a volume in itself; and while reason holds fast her sway, *must* and *will* be regarded as full, clear, incontrovertible, and conclusive. To say nothing of the recorded testimony to this fact, furnished by chosen witnesses, that from a standing memorial, the change of Sabbath rest from the seventh to the first day of the week, cannot lightly be passed over by us. The witnesses to the resurrection of our Lord and Master have long ago gone to their own place of repose; but the Lord's day still survives to back their record.

Through more than eighteen centuries this memorial has proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus, and to the end of time is it destined to rehearse the Lord's final triumph—His victory over death. But this testimony to our Lord's resurrection bears equally on the doctrine of our own. This consequent is bound to its

cause, by the express words of our Saviour Christ. "Because I live, ye shall live also."* "I have the keys of hell and of death."† "I am the resurrection and the life."‡

As Christ taught, so the Apostles preached. They delivered unto the Church that which also they received; how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures.§ Nor was the momentous consequence in relation to ourselves, less inculcated by the Apostles. As they preached "Christ crucified—Christ dead—Christ risen from the dead;" so they preached "Christ the first-fruits of them that slept."||

As sure, then, as on natural principles, the first fruit of the harvest assures the certainty of the harvest, so sure, on Christian principles, the resurrection of Jesus Christ assures the certainty of a general resurrection.

To conclude. There is not an attribute of the Supreme Being, so far as is made known to us, the vindication of which is not inseparably interwoven with the doctrine of a general resurrection. "What shall they do," says an Apostle, "which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead, and why stand we in jeopardy every hour?"¶ What trials, under the early struggles of the Gospel, what sufferings, even unto death, did not often attend the obedience of faith! This submission of themselves to the Lord Jesus, under the best ventures of their faith, subjected them to penal statutes and imperial edicts, involving confiscation, imprison-

* John xiv. 19. † Rev. i. 18. ‡ John xi. 25. § 1 Cor. xv. 3. || 1 Cor. xv. 20. ¶ 1 Cor. xv. 29.

ment, and death. Alas! they were baptized, not for the living, but for the dead,—not for the visible, but for the invisible body of Christ. But how are all these things to be reconciled with the Divine Mercy which is declared to be over all? Is the mercy of God clean gone for ever? No. These blessed martyrs to the faith of Jesus shall come forth. The chief speaker expresses the sentiments of that noble army. “Knowing, that He which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise us up also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.”* Then, whatever may be here affirmed of sufferings endured, the Divine attribute of mercy will find its honorable vindication.

Mark, too, how the severe attributes of Jehovah claim for themselves that the dead be raised again to life and to judgment. “Justice shall go before him; righteousness and equity are the habitation of thy seat.”† And shall the grave, then, affix an oblivious seal on all the ungodly deeds which the ungodly have in this life so ungodly committed? Shall flagrant injustice, unwashed by repentance, sleep the eternal sleep which knows no waking? Shall the voice of the archangel and the trump of God awake from the tomb no foul invader of holy bonds; no fell despoiler, whose too credulous victim, cast off, roams cheerless the world’s wide waste? Seem we not to hear the appeal from many a tomb, where broken hearts and wrongs unredressed have sunk? “O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth, thou God to whom vengeance belongeth, show thyself; arise, thou Judge of the world.”‡ Hear we not the response which silences the perturbations of the dead? “Be still, and know that I am

* 2 Cor. iv. 14.

† Ps. lxxxix. 14.

‡ Ps. xciv. 1.

God.* Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." Truly, the justice of God, which goes before Him, the righteousness and equity which are the habitation of His seat, demand a general return to life of the guilty dead. Reason cannot else be satisfied. The ungodly must come forth to shame and everlasting contempt.

If the reasoning now be just, and the grounds authoritative, they prove incontestably that a general Resurrection is both a possible and probable event. More than that, it is an event most indubitably certain. The omniscience of Jehovah—His omnipotence—the economy of Nature—the Old Testament authority—the meridian splendor of the Gospel—the Resurrection of Jesus Christ—God's truth, His mercy, His righteousness and equity—unite, concur, and appeal irresistibly to the understanding, to the conscience, and to the heart of man—"Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?"

And now, may we not ask, is no motive of strength furnished from this doctrine for serious inquiry? Shall not each one seasonably reflect what may be his place in the winding up of the drama of all earthly life? We indeed now live—but shall we live always? No; we must all die, for all have sinned. But if our doctrine be not incredible, it must follow that the grave shall not record the closing scene in the history of the human frame. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. This corruptible must put on incorruption, this mortal shall put on immortality. That our probationary course will impress its character on the resurrection of our bodies, is a truth equally sustained with that of

* Ps. xlv. 10.

the doctrine itself. Come forth, indeed, we must; but on the improvement or abuse of this short term must the issue essentially depend. "If we have been planted together in the likeness of Christ's death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."* We shall become spiritually-minded here, purified unto Christ, a peculiar people, whole-hearted in our service unto the Lord, abounding in life and peace, willing to live and ready to die, with a reasonable, religious and holy hope of realizing the blessedness of those who have part in the first Resurrection. But if of another spirit, —living after the flesh, strangers to self-crucifixion, void of the life of Jesus,—take heed lest the Master, coming upon us suddenly, sever us everlastingly from the Christian hope. Come forth we shall; but then a resurrection of shame and everlasting contempt is the recorded portion of such. God Almighty grant, that we may each of us so live, so hasten unto the coming of Christ, and so die, as to be accounted worthy of a part in the Resurrection of the Just, through Jesus Christ our Lord.



SERMON LVI.

THE GENERAL JUDGMENT.

"For we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ."—Rom. xiv. 10.

OUR future arraignment at the bar of an omniscient and righteous Judge, whether considered by itself or

* Rom. vi. 5.

in its eternal consequences, is one of the most solemn and affecting disclosures of Revelation.

The scene is thus described by an inspired pen. "I saw a great white throne and Him that sat on it: from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead small and great stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them, and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire; this is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."* Each inspired writer, in turn, adverts to this grand assize. Among these allusions we find the one recorded in our text: "For we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." While discoursing on this subject, we will endeavor to show, according to a usual method, first, the possibility, then the probability, and lastly, the high moral certainty, of a judgment to come.

From the second Epistle of St. Peter we may learn, that in all ages a class of persons may be expected, whom he terms scoffers—men who affect to ridicule the notion of a judgment to come as though such an event was impossible in itself. But the Apostle immediately discloses the secret of this infidelity. They are represented as men "walking after their own lusts,"† and therefore easily disposed to discredit whatever may

* Rev. xx. 11.

† 2 Pet. iii. 3.

interfere with the enjoyment of their criminal pursuits. "Where," say they, "is the promise of his coming, for since the Fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation?" The reasoning seems to be this: "Judgment has not yet overtaken us, therefore it never will." As Solomon long ago expressed it, "Because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."* It might be useful to this class of persons to remember, that a future judgment, to say the least, is something not impossible in itself. On the contrary, we have, in the omniscience and omnipotence of Jehovah, two incontrovertible pledges of the possibility of such an event. First, in the Divine omniscience. "The eyes of the Lord," says Solomon, "are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."† He searcheth the heart. He traces its imagination through each and all the successive stages of thought, desire, purpose, execution. The possibility of arraignment, indeed, before a human tribunal, may, in some instances, be questioned. The criminal transaction may be involved in the profoundest mystery. Yet, even in these cases, how often have not the merest contingencies opened the way to discovery! Years may have elapsed, and the perpetrator may long since have appropriated to himself the cry of peace and safety,—when, unexpectedly, some clue is furnished by an avenging Providence. This has been laid hold on by skilful hands, and the plot unravelled, until the culprit himself, awed in spirit by the mysterious action of Almighty God, has added his own confession to the manifold proofs which had

* Eccl. viii. 11.

† Prov. xv. 3.

thickened around him. It would seem, from the records of human justice, as though, in some instances of the revelation of crime, a kind of supernatural discernment had been communicated to men. And so numerous are these extraordinary discoveries, that to deny the possibility of detection in any supposable case, where the perpetrator was this side the grave, would be wholly unreasonable.

But if such be the difficulties of evading even a human tribunal, where men have no wisdom but what they have received, then with what show of reason shall the scorner ridicule the notion of a judgment to come? Is the Creator less than the creature to whom His inspiration has given wisdom? Is there any secret thing with thee? asketh Job.* “No; there is nothing covered,” says our Lord, “which shall not be revealed; nor hid that shall not be known.”† “For God,” says Solomon, “shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”‡ The Divine omniscience, therefore, is a pledge to us of the possibility of a judgment to come. But the Divine omnipotence is as competent and as free to arrest and to arraign the offender, as is omniscience to find him out. Among men, indeed, the guilty may be well known, but he is a fugitive from justice. He lurks within some dark cavern, or haunts the impenetrable morass, or has passed beyond seas, or wanders under disguise, and mingles with a dense population, unknowing and unknown. And yet from what, after all, has been done, who will say that the criminal’s arrest, under any circumstances of life, is impossible. In how many known

* Job xv. 11.

† Matt. x. 26.

‡ Eccl. xii. 14.

instances has not the criminal been successfully pursued through the obscurest haunts, and over the world's wide wilderness? His sagacity, however keen, has been more than equalled.

The very measures deemed essential to his security have become so many waymarks by which his course has been tracked, and his seizure effected. In defiance of all his misdirected ingenuity, and of all his desperate resistance, he has been brought before his judge and condemned. But if these things have happened again and again, through the agency of a creature of so limited ability as man, what may we not expect when an Omnipotent hand is put forth to apprehend and arraign the fugitive. What though his spirit may have sprung beyond this world's confines. What though his remains may have mouldered in the dust, or dissolved in the depths of the sea: under the power of God's word, the earth and the sea, like faithful keepers, shall give up the prisoners confided to their care, and these shall be judged, every man according to his works. The scorner, then, may delight in his scorning; but while the Divine omniscience and omnipotence endure, so long are we assured of the possibility of a judgment to come.

Again: A future judgment is an event not only within the range of possibility, as we have seen, but also highly probable in itself. This will appear from the perfection of the Divine government, and consequent impartial administration of Divine justice; from the dictates of reason; from the monitions of conscience; from the character of human life considered as a state of probation; and, lastly, from the expectation of such an event, found in all ages, and among all nations. Consider then, first, the perfection of the Divine gov-

ernment, and consequent impartial administration of Divine justice. Human governments must necessarily partake of human imperfection. But in the same degree as the government is imperfect in its structure, will the impartial administration of justice be defeated.

Hence neither a perfect government, nor an impartial administration, has ever yet existed among men. Not so with the Moral Governor of the universe. His law and moral providence, emanating from infinite wisdom, must be perfect. As it is written, "O Lord, our Governor, how excellent is thy name in all the world. Thou that hast set Thy glory above the Heavens."* As the Divine system of rule is perfect in itself, so in practice it must be just. But such practical justice has never yet been exhibited; is not, indeed, here to be expected where we see only in part; and, therefore, a future judgment, to conclude no more, is highly probable. All admit that the Divine administration, as now seen and considered simply in itself, and with no reference to future decisions which are to clear up and vindicate the whole, is often exceedingly obscure, and while Reason sits upon her throne, can never be reconciled with our notions of perfect justice. We see guilt triumphant, innocence depressed. We see the wicked in great prosperity, and good men, in the midst of life and of usefulness, bowed under afflictive strokes, and hastening to the grave. Look where we will, we see something inscrutable, which, like an index finger, points to a future day. So numerous, indeed, are these inscrutable providences, that it were wiser to say with the fool, "there is no God," than to say with the scorner, "Where is the promise of his coming?" If the Lord be God, if the divine attributes be perfect in themselves, and so to be judicially manifest-

* Psal. viii. 1.

ed, then, to say the least, a future judgment is highly probable. Hence such an event falls in with the dictate of reason. The best natural light we possess would seem to demand it, if on no other ground, yet on this, to clear up difficulties, and to make manifest to all the righteousness and equity of the Divine governorship. Nor is future judgment less agreeable to the monitions of conscience. Conscience is that inferior tribunal whose office it is to discern the character of a man's own actions. In every instance of decision, conscience feels the check of a higher tribunal. Its voice responds to the decrees of a future tribunal, which thus are promulgated by the Supreme Lawgiver for the warning of mankind.

A remarkable instance of this instinctive apprehension of judgment among barbarians is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. When St. Paul was wrecked and cast on a barbarous shore where the voice of Revelation had never been heard, a viper came out of the fire which had been kindled, and fastened on his hand. The barbarians immediately concluded that he had committed some enormity, and that a venomous serpent, as an instrument in the hands of the gods, or as one of the gods, was now about to inflict that vengeance from which he had escaped in the sea. From this incident it plainly appears, that these barbarians had impressions not only of good and evil, but also of some mysterious tribunal, under the awards of which the one would be recompensed, and the other punished.

Again: The character of human life, considered as a state of probation, wonderfully heightens the probability of a judgment to come. Were good men (we mean men of faith and of the Holy Ghost) *now* to re-

ceive their recompense or reward, they would be deprived necessarily of an occasion for the exercise of some of the most invaluable graces of the Spirit. Christian meekness is responsive in its nature to the provocations of life; Christian patience, to the tribulations of life; Christian faith, to the temptations of life; Christian forgiveness, to the injuries of life; Christian moderation, to the redundancies of life; and Christian contentment, to the privations of life. These passive virtues will not be found in Heaven. In that blest abode there will be no occasion for their exercise. We shall find no provocation, no tribulation, no temptation, no injuries. That state is holy and happy, and the soul will there mingle her sympathies and her joys with those of an innumerable company of angels, and of the spirits of the just. So, also, on the other side. Were sentence upon the ungodly speedily executed—were the wicked suddenly driven away in their wickedness, they would be deprived necessarily of the space indispensably required for self-arraignment, for serious reflection, for repentance and amendment. These mental engagements are the peculiar virtues of a sinner while under his probationary term. Now is the accepted time in which to exercise repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The chief of sinners is now the object of a Redeemer's compassion, for the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Now the chief of sinners is privileged to accuse and condemn himself before the tribunal within his own breast, to sit as a righteous judge in his own case, to appeal from the demerit of his sins to the precious blood of atonement, to carry up, as it were, without pleading, his cause from the sure sentence of the law to a higher and more beneficent power than the Roman

Cæsar. But then, to what does this whole economy point, in whatever view considered? Why, in the very nature of things, it looks to some higher tribunal beyond the earth. Probation is a stewardship, and the very notion of a stewardship involves accountability to the Divine Master. Still farther: to these arguments for the probability of a judgment to come, we may add another, derived from the general expectation of such an event among all nations: in a certain sense, and with due limitations, it may be truly affirmed, that the universal voice of mankind is the voice of God. An expectation of a Messiah had pervaded the whole world. That much error and much superstition should have blended with this expectation, is not to be wondered at, when we consider that they now blend with the Gospel of Jesus Christ; but the expectation itself was another thing, and in the fulness of time it was found to be as just as it had generally pervaded the habitable world. Of this character is the expectation of a future judgment. It is emphatically the expectation and desire of all ages and of all nations. We have seen, in the case cited from the Acts, that barbarians are not without some impressions of such an event. They know not, indeed, all in relation to this matter which the Gospel has revealed. They cannot say that the day is appointed, that the Lord Jesus Christ will be enthroned in judgment, that the judgment will have no respect of persons, that it will immediately succeed the close of the present dispensation, that it will be restricted to the works done in the body. These discoveries by the Gospel, on deeply interesting particulars, are not essential to expectation; but the nation is yet to be found, which, in its religious system, has not afforded evidence of faith in some grand future event

equivalent in its nature to a judicial process. It would seem difficult to account for this general impression, but on the fact of some early communication from God to man on a point of so much importance to be known. We know, indeed, from well-attested history, that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, preached the judgment to come. Noah is termed also "a preacher of righteousness." The inference seems to be unavoidable, that the dispersion, after the flood, carried with it, into all the regions of the earth, the light which then existed on this important doctrine. Certain it is, that a judgment to come is the uniform voice of the earth, and this voice of the earth may be an echo from the eternal world of righteousness.

We proceed, lastly, to show that a future judgment is an event of the highest moral certainty. It is affirmed by St. Paul, of our Saviour Jesus Christ, that He "hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel."* By which we may understand, that some important truths not clearly discoverable by natural reason, and but obscurely revealed under former dispensations, are by the Gospel made manifest to the understandings and consciences of men. Among these now manifest truths is the event of the general judgment. We need not recite the Scriptures of the New Testament on this doctrine: they are generally express, and every page bears an allusion to the august judicial scene which is to wind up the grand moral experiment in God's Creation. Are we commanded to repent? it is because God hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness.† Are we exhorted to a patient continuance in well-doing? it is with

* 2 Tim. i. 10.

† Acts xvii. 31.

reference to the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds.* Do the strong oppress the weak, do they overawe the administration of human laws and tramp with impunity on their sacred claims? they are reminded of the Father of all, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work.† The appointed day is termed the great and terrible day of the Lord. Mark, too, the *universality* of the judgment: Before him shall be gathered all nations. Mark the facility with which character will be determined, and a separation effected: "And he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats."‡ The time would fail us, to refer in the slightest manner to every recognition of this doctrine in the Sacred Word. It is interwoven with the whole texture of the Gospel, and had the establishment of this doctrine been the single object of Christ's mission to our world, it could not possibly have been stated with more clearness, and, on all essential points, with more fulness to our minds. The event of a future judgment is then a doctrine of the Gospel; and as the great body of evidence which sustains the whole Gospel sustains its parts respectively, so whatever weight of testimony to the truth of the Gospel may be derived from prophecy, from miracle, from the early history of the Gospel, and from the fruits of the Gospel, attests with equal certainty the event of a future judgment; but it is the resurrection of Jesus Christ which imparts to this doctrine its crowning measure of moral certainty. "Because," saith an Apostle, "He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness, by

* Rom. ii. 6.

† 1 Pet. i. 17.

‡ Matt. xxv. 32.

that Man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised Him from the dead.”*

Whatever weight of evidence, therefore, to the fact of Christ’s resurrection, may be derived from prophecy, from types, from the testimony of witnesses, numerous, competent, serious and sincere, as well as from a standing memorial in the Christian Church, attests with equal certainty the event of a judgment to come.

To conclude. If the reasoning be just, and the grounds rational and scriptural, they prove, and we think incontestably, that a future judgment is an event which *can* be effected, *may* be effected, and, on the highest degree of moral certainty, *will* be effected. The Divine omniscience—the omnipotence of Jehovah—the perfection of His government—the impartial administration of His justice—the dictates of reason—the monitions of conscience—the character of human life as a state of probation—the general expectation of such an event in all ages and among all nations—the express declarations of the Gospel, and the fact of Christ’s resurrection—unite, concur, and with one voice confirm what our text declares, that “we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.”

The question, then, of importance to each individual is, Do I live in a state of preparation, and on the Gospel terms, for the judgment of that day? As it is written, “Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!”† How shall I be found under the decisions of eternal moment? Shall I be found as one who has insulted the Court below and defied the Court above? or as one who has habitually revered the lower tribunal, arraigned

* Acts xvii. 31.

† Amos iv. 12.

himself before it, received with meekness its rebuke, repented under its monition, and fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before him? Shall I appear as a professing Christian, whose business in life it has been to deceive his own heart, to substitute names for things, and to excuse the performance of plain and obvious duties? or as one who, in the spirit of the Gospel, has met provocation with meekness, tribulation with patience, temptation with faith, injuries with forgiveness,—in a word, as one who has lived with reference to a day of retribution—who, like the Apostle, has found comfort in such prospect, and has now approached the Great Throne with unfaltering confidence in the Judge that sits upon it? May God seasonably replenish our hearts with heavenly grace, and qualify us, individually, for a joyful acquittal in that great and terrible day.

SERMON LVII.*

THE DOOR OF MERCY NOT ALWAYS TO BE OPEN.

“When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door.”—St. Luke xiii. 25.

WE need not recite the whole of this luminous discourse delivered by our Lord. The introductory portion we have quoted in our text is sufficient for our present purpose, which is, in dependence on God, to bring the exceeding privileges of the times we now

* The last Sermon written by the Author, preached May 4th, 1851.

enjoy in contrast with the great change indicated in our text, and to derive from both, in behalf of those to whom it may apply, a prevailing motive to religious decision.

The annual visitation of our Bishop is at hand. Some of you have not received the Holy Ghost since you believed; or, as we should now express it, some of the serious persons among you have not been confirmed. Such need be incited to improve the approaching visitation. Such an occasion, where afforded, is a standing means of grace, of comparatively rare exhibition. One of the most affecting narratives of Scripture is founded on the closing scene of one of these visitations. It is said, They all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.* Episcopal visitation is, in character, the same in all ages. In every instance, it is a token of Divine manifestation, a mark of Divine goodness and favor toward us. Were it expected, that on the occasion St. Paul himself would come unto us from the dead, nothing more could be done in our spiritual behalf than may be done through the instrumentality God is pleased now to employ. There were places, in which it is said our Lord himself could not do many mighty works, because of a prevailing unbelief among the people. It is so now. A few among us, studious of our own salvation, and trusting in God through the instruments of the Gospel, will gratefully receive their confirmation; others are of that spirit which would resist an angel, or evade his force. Nevertheless, the proffered help is yet before us. The door, if shut upon

* Acts xx. 37.

the soul, will be shut by ourselves. When we say the visitation is before us, we dare not speak in the sense of any unqualified certainty of its coming within the enjoyment of this or that particular individual. "For what is your life?" says an Apostle; "it is even a vapor, which appeareth for a little time, and then passeth away."* We know not the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh. So far from being privileged with the visitation of our chief minister, we may be nearer the coming of our common Lord and Master. So far from being found, at that period, a candidate for Confirmation, you may exist only as a disembodied spirit, closed irrevocably in your probation, a candidate only for the decisions of judgment and the awards of eternity. So far from occupying the privilege of an open door, you may be numbered with those who have begun to stand without, the door having been shut by authority, and shut for ever. So far from being persuaded and importuned, you may have taken place with the hopeless petitioners referred to in our text. Our Record will show, that liability of death is not the mere creature of fancy. The last visitation of our Bishop found interred within his grave a most acceptable candidate for Confirmation. Still, we say, the door is now open. Our circumstances are yet probationary. We can now calmly survey the approaching day of visitation. We can seasonably look upon the hand stretched out for our help. We may see in it a manifestation, an instrument of the Gospel, which, however denied to thousands, is to be extended to us; creating, in relation to some among you, a duty of unquestionable obligation, though it cover a privi-

* James iv. 14.

lege of inestimable worth. We can now estimate this privilege in all its bearings on both worlds, and we may do this gratefully and devoutly. What is more, we are now in the enjoyment of unimpaired mental vigor and of reasonable health. We can create a pause in the ordinary whirl of our thoughts. We are capable of self-arraignment, of enlightened forecast, of provisional care. We can now quietly mature a right judgment, and secure to ourselves a wise decision. The high privilege of the present time will further appear, when we consider the Scripture doctrine of supernatural help which pertains to it. The fact of our condition as redeemed sinners, bought with a price, has interested all moral intelligences in our behalf. They seem to know us only as beings for whom Christ died. The Holy Spirit was pleased to choose his own instrumentalities, and through them to become our Sanctifier and Comforter. The holy angels are called our ministering spirits. The holy Apostles call themselves our servants for Jesus' sake. Their successors await our beck and call.

Every where, and on all sides round, are we cheered with the assurance of a universal sympathy in our behalf for Christ's sake. Nor are these supernatural helps less real because invisible; no more than prayers are less effectual, because made for us in secret; or energies, because hidden from our observation, less active on our own powers. Should it please God to bring us to himself, we may there learn through whose instrumentality, and by what process we came there. These invisible but effective allies, however unconsciously to ourselves, act upon our inward frame. They arrest our devious thoughts in a way which eludes all suspicion. They, as hidden from ourselves, influence our determina-

tions. They aid our feeble efforts in standing upright, or in lifting up a withered hand, or in taking up the bed which had once supported our languishing frame. These are the powers which strengthen us when we do stand, or which lift us up when fallen. These are the allies for Jesus' sake, which, in every instance of a willing and obedient mind, have secured those invaluable results in both worlds, which otherwise could not have been expected. Such being the good will of all Heaven towards the Redeemer's purchase, the Scriptures assure us that no good thing will be capriciously or needlessly withheld from us. The Divine help, essential to our real welfare, is put under our own invocation; and where we ask of God in a spirit that will consecrate the gift to our own profit, there we shall receive. Whatever is divinely promised to a right mind may be humbly and confidently expected; and if we do not receive, the fault must be at home. God knoweth our necessities, and to a right spirit is ever gracious and merciful; because, in the great venture of our faith, we cannot ultimately succeed without him. All these, and many other considerations, wonderfully deepen our impression of the exceeding felicity of the times we now enjoy, and especially when viewed in contrast with the solemn language of the text.

Now, when we consider our fallen, impotent condition; our proneness to sin; the many temptations which befall us in life; the difficulties, too, in our pathway; the doctrine of supernatural allies, sympathies and helps, comes home to the heart, and is devoutly received by every true Christian as a source of consolation. It is a consideration full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort, and especially to such as feel within themselves the persuasive workings of the Spirit of Christ,

reproving the scorn of their lofty nature, mortifying its inflation, its impenitence and unbelief, and drawing up their minds from earthly to high and heavenly things. It wonderfully tends to confirm our faith, and to kindle towards God our best aspirations. Such persons indeed, after all, may, by a slow and increasing deflection from God, quench against themselves the Spirit of Christ, as Herod quenched against himself the ministry of John. But to a well-disposed mind,—and we trust that among us there are many such,—faith in the reality of supernatural action on the moral frame, often unconsciously to ourselves, is attended with cheering inspiration. We see in it the earnest of the Spirit in our individual case, a token of favor, a pledge of final success, intended of God to incite in a lively way our diligent and persevering co-operation. It shows to every man what the Apostle asserts, “that God hath not appointed us unto wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

In close connection with this comfortable doctrine is another stated by our Lord—we mean, the doctrine of final success assured to the perseverance and humility of faith. This is the more important, as the interval between ourselves and the end of our faith must needs be beset with many dreary discouragements.

The case supposed by our Lord, in exposition of this doctrine of assurance, is that of a householder taken on surprise by a midnight guest. Unable at the time to meet the claims of hospitality, he goes forth at that unseasonable hour in quest of a loan. We hear him at the door of a friend. “Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine, in his journey, is come to

* 1 Thess. v. 19.

me, and I have nothing to set before him.”* His application, however, meets with a statement of all manner of difficulties. His neighbor refused to be troubled at that unseasonable hour. His house was closed for the night. He himself had retired, and his children were asleep around him. “I say unto you,” says our Lord, “though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend; yet because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.” Now, importunity implies confidence in him whose intervention we entreat. It evidences, moreover, the pinch of need and the humility of faith. It proceeds upon the principle that God is not inexorable. And although for wise purposes, and especially for our improvement in lowly virtue, he may seemingly disregard us for a time, and even repel our approach, yet he will not cast us off for ever. He will never discredit in the issue a lowly virtue, nor make ashamed the patient waiting of faith. We see an application of this economy in the case of the Canaanitish mother in behalf of her daughter. While seeking for help, her faith was tried. But she had learned that patience needs her perfect work. She was not distrustful of our Lord; could leave with him the seeming difficulties of her case, while she appropriated to herself all the profit of delay.

The doctrine which assures to humble faith its final success, has need to be well understood in order to be appreciated. Thousands, overborne by discouragements, have fallen away, who, in their needed improvement of faith, should have patiently endured. There are now Christian people who, not unlike to

* Luke xi. 6.

Israel of old, are every way disappointed in religion, and often vexed. It would seem they have not been brought into a land that floweth with milk and honey. Nor have they received an inheritance of fields and vineyards. On the contrary, they live under a daily allowance; their souls are dried up within them; they have served God for many years; but have never received a kid to make merry with their friends. Thus the spirit of disaffection and murmuring comes over them. This peculiar temper of mind, though pardonable in ignorance, is wholly unreasonable. It is the folly of those who would divide the spoils ere the battle had been fought, or the victory won. They are concerned only to receive, though there be neither humility in their faith, nor importunity in their prayers. It is enough for all to be assured that, as on the part of God who hath promised, delay in fulfilling his word can proceed only from wise and gracious design; so, where the heart is honest and patient, no difficulty will be permitted to work its overthrow and ruin. It is the Lord's concern, where our trust is in him, that what was intended for our meat shall not become our poison.

But there is still a gracious doctrine most comforting now to the heart of man, and which presents a direct contrast with the awful scene disclosed in the text. We mean the affecting truth that, as there is a Mediator between God and man, so he represents and advocates on both sides. He is not less our advocate with the Father, than the Father's advocate with the family of mankind. "Behold," said our Lord, "I stand at the door and knock."* It is God's approach

* Rev. iii. 20.

to mankind through a Mediator. He persuades men to reconciliation. The door is now under our control. We shut, we open. The Mediator stands at the door and knocks, and offers terms of renewed intercourse and communion. He is our petitioner, and, without our assent and concurrence, will not obtrude His office upon us. No expressive imagery can more forcibly depict the high privilege we now enjoy. The offer of salvation is brought to our doors. We are saved upon choice. All is sympathy and condescension in our behalf; all is earnest desire towards us; all is movement towards us. All is assurance given us of readiness and good will on the part of Heaven. We read of persuasions having gone forth, of patient waiting at our doors, of knocking importunity to find admission, and to cement an ever-enduring fellowship and communion. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." O the goodness and condescension of Heaven! how overpowering in the appeals of grace and mercy! "Whence is this to me," said the lowly Elizabeth, "that the mother of my Lord should come unto me?"* but with infinitely heightened admiration, and with far profounder feelings of humility, might we not appropriate the sentiment and say, Whence is this to me, that my Lord himself should come unto me; be found in patient waiting at my door, yet, in divine advocacy, in the plenitude of saving power, importuning admission there?

But, beloved friends, we need but glance at our text in order to realize the conviction, that, however exalted our privileges, however felicitous our times, these, by an act of Almighty God, are destined to be

* Luke i. 43.

closed. What is more, they are to be measured to many by awful and soul-rending reverse. There is a peculiar solemnity in the intimation afforded of this change. "When once the master of the house is risen up and hath shut to the door." The dispensation of grace and mercy is, by a divine act, for ever closed. Much which was exalted unto heaven is to be thrust down. This is of individual application, and is now going on, as in countless instances it has been fulfilled. Death ordinarily performs this service, and we can scarcely have failed to mark his manner. With whatever exceptions attended, the commissioner, at a given time, closes but the term of an individual. Our friends and neighbors pass off, one after the other, not without an appeal to ourselves, though with but little impression. Thus has the master of the house arisen, and shut to the door, while all around us it is now closing. The emphatic term, "*once*," employed in our text, would seem to denote an irreparable condition—as though something was then to be done, which, when done, was never to be undone. Now, our Lord had the knowledge of both worlds, and he could speak as understandingly and accurately of the world of spirits as he has spoken of the world we inhabit. In speaking of the former, however, his language is necessarily figurative; for, strictly speaking, no human language can accurately describe spiritual realities. But we may be sure that the imagery in our text, employed by our Lord, gives to our conception the nearest resemblance possible. How awful is the spectacle exhibited in our text! It would seem to be that of an individual once in the enjoyment of the privileged state we have noticed, but who had failed to improve it; of a man who, having squandered his birthright, would now inherit

the blessing; of a man who, through the term of his probation, had amused himself with fancies or trifled with God's mercies, and then sought to secure Heaven when it was all too late; of a man who, in the waste of life, had died unprepared, and had begun to experience a hopeless condition. How solemn and affecting, we say, the contemplation! We may here perceive, moreover, that it pertains to another state of existence to give the experimental sense of what, either way, the pen of inspiration now pictures to our minds. As we now sow, so shall we reap. Each class, upon death, will begin to realize with new and strange feelings; the one, the precious fruit of their patience and of their toil—the other, the irremediable consequences of neglect. Beloved friends, we can have no pleasure in eyeing the spectacle which our text presents. God forbid that it should ever come within the realization of any here present; but let it ever be remembered, that as we discern the face of the sky and gather somewhat infallible indications of succeeding weather, so in spiritual things, there are signs afforded us of final issues. In this view we regard the annual visitations of our chief minister with the liveliest sensibility. Most earnestly do we desire and pray, that whatever ought to be done may be done, and that whatever is done may be done in a spirit and manner acceptable to God and edifying to the Church. It is not the mere receiving or not receiving Confirmation on any particular occasion which, in itself, gives the token of final results. Some, we fear, have been confirmed to their condemnation; but it is the prevailing temper of mind thereby made to appear—the reverence, the meekness and humility, the heavenly determinations of mind, the renunciation of the world, the fresh consecration of the heart

and of its best affections to our Redeemer; these give the token which invigorates our toil. The same rule which applies to the least will apply to the greatest, and for the same reason that an individual now neglects or lays over his devout obedience to the Gospel, when an opportunity is afforded him, has he a sign from Heaven, that death, when it comes, will find him equally unprepared in heart or mind for the judgment which awaits him. This truth is rehearsed among us every year. We part with friends who die as they have lived, in neglect of the great salvation—leaving to the survivors but little more than a mysterious suspense, as to their escape. Die, indeed, we all must, for death hath passed upon all; and upon one after another shall the sentence be fulfilled. But the cold hand which uncages the spirit, closes the door on her eternal destinies. Yet precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.* Happy, thrice happy the spirit which, in the lowly obedience of the Gospel, had here received the signs of redeeming love; which now, quickened anew, begins to realize what was hidden from her vision, or only partially and obscurely seen. The one half had not been told her. She had here no eye to see, no ear to hear, no comprehension to take in; but now the Apocalyptic vision is realized. She is “full of eyes within,” as though illumined with celestial glory. All ear, as though her very existence vibrated to angelic melody. All heart, to swell in rapturous sensibility to what God had prepared for her perfect consummation and bliss. How contrasted her state with that of the victims of neglect? See an immortal spirit shut out, standing without knocking, but

* Ps. cxvi. 15

with unavailing importunity; now weeping, now wailing, now infuriated, now agonizing under an irreversible decree which had fixed her endless doom. O! what we have to do, let us do it with our might. Let our privileged state be improved. Let no occasion pass unheeded. Now is the accepted time—behold! now is the day of salvation.

THE END.

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NOTES

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