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EXEGETICAL STUDIES.



# EXEGETICAL STUDIES.

BY

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

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SEVERAL of the following papers have already appeared in different Magazines, and are incorporated in this work by the kind permission of the editors of these Magazines. The object of these Exegetical Studies is to bring the result of modern exegesis to bear upon the interpretation of some difficult passages of Scripture. Some of these passages, as for example, "Our Lord's Blessing to Peter," "Saved by Fire," and "The Spirits in Prison," are of great importance, and have given rise to much controversy in the Church of Christ; while all of them have been very differently understood by leading divines belonging to different schools of theology. Whether in this work anything has been added to their elucidation the reader must judge. In discussing them I have endeavoured to be fair and impartial; nor do I think that the reader will find any trace of that most objectionable of all polemical artifices by which the controversialist attempts to prejudice his reader against his opponent—the *odium theologicum*.

GALASHIELS MANSE,  
*March, 1884.*



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# EXEGETICAL STUDIES.



## EXPOSITION I.

### BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.

MATTHEW xii. 31, 32.

*Textus receptus.*—Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν, Πᾶσα ἁμαρτία καὶ βλασφημία ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις· ἡ δὲ τοῦ Πνεύματος βλασφημία οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις. Καὶ ὅς ἂν εἴπῃ λόγον κατὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ· ὅς δ' ἂν εἴπῃ κατὰ τοῦ Πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου, οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ οὔτε ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι οὔτε ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι.

*Authorised Version.*—Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men : but the blasphemy *against* the *Holy Ghost* shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him : but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come.

*Revised Version.*—Therefore I say unto you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men ; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him ; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come.

BESIDES this passage in St. Matthew's gospel, we have two other statements regarding this sin, given

with slight deviations, in the gospel of St. Mark (iii. 28-30) and of St. Luke (xii. 10). In St. Matthew's gospel the sin is spoken of as τοῦ Πνεύματος βλασφημία; whilst in St. Mark's gospel it is ὅς δ' ἄν βλασφημήσῃ εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον; and in St. Luke's gospel τῶ εἰς τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα βλασφημήσαντι. There is also a remarkable and well authenticated reading in St. Mark's gospel, in the clause ἔνοχος ἐστὶν αἰωνίου κρίσεως, "is in danger of eternal judgment;" the best MSS. have ἀμαρτήματος instead of κρίσεως, "is guilty of an eternal sin."<sup>1</sup>—(*Revised Version.*)

All these three statements declare the sin to consist in blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, but in none of them is there a description of the nature of this sin. The subject is beset with difficulty, and requires much caution in its treatment. This difficulty arises partly from the indefinite nature of the declaration of our Lord,—whether we are to understand it as an assertion of the criminality of the Pharisees, whose conduct gave rise to it, or as an admonition addressed to them; partly because the statement stands by itself apart, there being no direct mention of this sin in other portions of Scripture; and partly from the mystery which is inseparably connected with the doctrine of the Spirit's agency. Nor would the determination of this sin, or, if that is impossible, at least the negative statement of its nature—showing wherein it does not consist—be of much practical importance, were it not that it has been the occasion of anxiety and trouble

<sup>1</sup> Adopted by Griesbach, Tischendorf, Lachmann, Meyer, and Alford.

to many scrupulous persons, preventing their reception of the consolations of the Gospel, and impairing their usefulness.

Numerous opinions have been formed concerning the nature of the sin against the Holy Ghost. With the exception of those who consider the words of our Lord as descriptive of the sin of the Pharisees in ascribing His miracles to the agency of Satan, almost every writer has adopted an opinion of his own. Some suppose that the sin against the Son of Man is an offence against a person which may be forgiven, but that the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is an offence against a precept or law, and accordingly irreversible and eternal in its effects. Others have resolved the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost into final unbelief, impenitence, and hardness of heart, because this state of mind does in its own nature exclude forgiveness. Others have supposed that wilful, deliberate, and presumptuous sins, committed by those who were once awakened, and, for a time, made a fair profession of religion, are unpardonable sins against the Holy Ghost. Others have regarded this sin as equivalent to apostasy, in conformity with the words of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, when he says that it is impossible to restore to repentance those who have fallen away after they have been enlightened, and have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost (Heb. vi. 4). Others have made it to consist in that species of infidelity which manifests itself in sneering at and blaspheming the sacred truths of religion, and in

spreading known lies and calumnies against Christianity. Others have regarded it as hatred, directed especially against the Holy Ghost and His operations, and disclosing itself in blasphemous expressions. Others would have it to consist in a malicious opposition to the truth, when they know and are convinced that it is the truth. Others think that it cannot be any particular sin, but a general and total rejection of the only means of recovery from sin. And it is the opinion of not a few that the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost was the very sin which the Pharisees committed, when they attributed the miracles, which our Lord performed by the agency of the Holy Ghost, to the devil, a sin aggravated by this circumstance that it was committed by those who were eye-witnesses of these miracles, and who had the most convincing proofs of their reality; and consequently a sin which, at least in its outward form, cannot be committed in the present day, seeing that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit are withdrawn from the Church. "The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost," says Meyer, "may be defined to be the sin which a man commits when he rejects the undoubted revelation of the Holy Spirit, and that not merely with a contemptuous moral indifference, but with the evil will struggling to shut out the light of that revelation; and even goes the length of expressing in hostile language his deliberate and conscious opposition to this divine principle." And Julius Müller thus expresses his views of the subject: "The nature of this sin is *hatred*



*of that which is cognised as Divine, and the blasphemy is the expression of this hatred. He who has observed with some degree of attentiveness the heights of human corruption in its more spiritual forms, will have noticed this remarkable phenomenon, how those, who have reached such heights, cannot rest in their aversion to that which is holy and divine, but as with irresistible violence are impelled to give vent to the same by revilings; how it furnishes them a vile satisfaction to belch forth their most horrifying blasphemies."*

From this variety of opinion it would appear that if any particular sin, any definite act of blasphemy, be meant, which we do not deny may be the case, that act of sin is to us unknown; unless indeed, we adopt the opinion that it is the particular sin of which the Pharisees were guilty when they attributed our Lord's miracles to Satan; an opinion which we shall afterwards prove to be erroneous, but which we may at present regard as extremely doubtful. If it be a particular and overt act of sin, God has not been pleased to reveal it, and all attempts to discover it will end in unfounded hypothesis and failure. This concealment may have arisen from the mercy of God. If this be a sin of such enormity as to be unpardonable, and if it had been revealed, such is the insane enmity of men's hearts to God, that they would be tempted to commit it. So great is human depravity, so great is our perverseness and rebellion, that the knowledge that an action is forbidden by God is a

sufficient inducement for us to do it. A divine prohibition appears to have a tendency to excite to action that carnal mind which exists within us, and which not only Scripture, but our own sad experience tells us is enmity against God.

In discussing the nature of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, it will be necessary first to consider the occasion on which this sin was mentioned, and its application to the Pharisees, whose conduct called forth the declaration of our Lord. Our blessed Lord had just performed a stupendous miracle; He had healed a blind and dumb man possessed of a devil, "in so much that the blind and dumb both spake and saw." This had produced a great impression upon the multitude, so that they were on the point of acknowledging Him to be the promised Messiah. All the people were amazed and said, "Is not this the son of David?" Upon this the Pharisees interposed, and maliciously insinuated that this great miracle was performed by the agency of the devil. "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils." They were resolved not to believe on our Lord upon any evidence whatever, and to do all in their power to destroy the impression which His doctrines and miracles made upon the people; and as they could not deny the reality of His miracles, they endeavoured to persuade the people that they were performed, not by the agency of God, but by the power of evil spirits, and that consequently, they were no argument in favour of a divine authority. Our

Lord confutes their foul calumny, and administers to them a severe rebuke. He shows them how absurd was their notion that Satan would lend his power to cast out devils. His kingdom would then be self-destructive, and his authority would come to a close. "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city, and house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?" And, as a second argument, He reasons with them on their own principles. There were some among the Jews, probably of the sect of the Pharisees, who took upon themselves to cast out devils, conjuring them by the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out?" Is it by the name of God, or by the power of the devil? If by the name of God, as you will readily admit, why do you attribute miracles of the same nature, which I also profess to perform in the name of God, to the power of the devil? Surely it manifests the most inveterate prejudice, to attribute actions of the same nature to the most opposite agencies. And He derives a third argument from the nature of His teaching. The very design of His teaching was to destroy the works of the devil, to overthrow the kingdom of Satan; and therefore it was impossible to suppose that miracles wrought in confirmation of such teaching were performed by the power of the devil. "How can one enter into the strong man's house and spoil

his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his goods. He that is not with Me is against me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad." And, having thus refuted the calumny of the Pharisees, He addressed to them this severe rebuke: "Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." And in the gospel of Mark the reason of this rebuke is given, "Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit" (Mark iii. 30).

Some of the clauses of our Lord's declaration require explanation, especially as different meanings have been assigned to them. When our Lord says, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men;" these words have been taken to mean, that with the exception of the sin against the Holy Ghost, all sins will ultimately be forgiven. But the statement hardly supports this inference. The contrast is drawn between all other sins and the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost: these are declared to be remissible, but this to be irremissible. When it is said, "Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him;" the title "Son of Man" must not be considered as equivalent to man, implying an ignorance of Christ's supreme dignity;

but is the usual Messianic designation, and as such involves His exalted nature. When it is said that, "Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him," these words are not to be toned down and softened, as if they were to be understood comparatively, that all other sins will sooner be forgiven than this blasphemy against the Holy Ghost (Grotius); or that whereas a general repentance will avail for other sins, this can only be pardoned on a particular repentance (Hammond). Such interpretations do not come up to the force of our Saviour's words. He here declares that all other sins may be pardoned, but that this shall not; that it is the only unpardonable sin; and that it shall not be forgiven, neither in this world nor in that which is to come. Nor is it to be imagined that the reason why to speak against the Holy Ghost is a more heinous crime than to speak against the Son of Man is on account of the superior dignity of the Holy Ghost. In Christ dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; He and the Holy Ghost are one. But the reason lies in the clearer revelation which shall be made by the Holy Ghost, and therefore the greater aggravation incurred in sinning against that revelation. As Olshausen remarks: "We may conceive Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as gradations in the revelation of the Divine Being. The knowledge of God as the Father has reference to the power and wisdom; that of the Son to the love and mercy; and that of the Spirit to the holiness and perfection of the one Divine Being."

When it is affirmed that "the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come," it has been plausibly argued, that we are by this taught that there is forgiveness of sins in a future world—in the state between death and the resurrection, prior to the final judgment; for at that period the destinies of all men will be inevitably fixed. Augustine declares himself in favour of this opinion. Such also is the opinion of Olshausen in his exposition of this passage. And Julius Müller in his *Doctrine of Sin*, remarks: "There is according to these words a time to be expected, when all the sins of mankind, with the single exception of blasphemy of the Holy Ghost, will find forgiveness." But this is a somewhat doubtful foundation on which to build such an inference. The evident design of the Saviour is not to assert the remissibleness of all other sins in a future life, but to express in the strongest terms the unpardonable nature of this particular sin. Still, however, this sin may be of such a nature that all unpardoned sin may culminate in it; this is the case if the nature of this sin consists in final hardness and impenitence, for then it is the only sin which shall not be forgiven.

The meaning then of our Lord's declaration is as follows: All other sins and blasphemies, however great and aggravated they may be, are remissible; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is irremissible, and shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaks a word against Me, who calumniates My

person, it shall on his repentance be forgiven him. But whosoever speaks against the Holy Ghost, who calumniates Him, it shall not be forgiven him, the mercy of God shall not be extended to him ; he is guilty of eternal sin.

The sin which the Pharisees committed in ascribing our Lord's miracles to the agency of the devil was blasphemy of a heinous character, and was accompanied with peculiar aggravations. They were the eye-witnesses of our Lord's miracles ; they could not deny them, for they saw them with their bodily eyes ; they were also well aware of the purity of our Lord's life and doctrine ; they knew that the very design of His ministry was to destroy the works of the devil, to rescue men's bodies and souls from his power ; yet, notwithstanding this their knowledge and convictions, they bring forth the execrable calumny that He had an unclean spirit, and that His miracles were performed by the agency of the devil. And it must further be observed that these blasphemers were not ignorant persons, but learned men, the teachers of the people, who pretended to a superior sanctity, and who were acquainted with those sacred Scriptures which foretold the advent of the Messiah. And yet this was only a portion of their wickedness ; it was only the outward expression of that malice which existed in their hearts. And all this was well known to Christ. He was thoroughly acquainted with their malicious disposition, and it was on account of this extreme malignity that

He administered the severest rebuke He ever uttered.

But the question is: Did these Pharisees, in ascribing our Lord's miracles to Satan's agency, commit the sin against the Holy Ghost? Were they guilty of the unpardonable sin? This question has been answered in the affirmative by many divines of great learning and reputation.<sup>1</sup> Our Lord's miracles, they affirm, were performed by the power of the Holy Ghost (Matt. xii. 28); and therefore in ascribing them to Satan, the Pharisees blasphemed the Holy Ghost. And this is especially to be inferred from the explanation given in St. Mark's gospel; "because they said, He hath an unclean spirit." We cannot agree with this opinion. The blasphemy of the Pharisees was directed rather against Christ Himself than against the Holy Ghost. The words were spoken against the Son of Man, and were, as our Lord declares, pardonable. The Pharisees, it can hardly be doubted, were ignorant that the Agent by whom Christ performed His miracles was the Holy Ghost; and, if so, their blasphemy could have no conscious reference to that Divine Person. Besides, it is to be observed, that the Holy Ghost was not then given; it was not until Jesus was glorified that the Spirit was sensibly poured forth upon believers; there was no open manifestation of His influences (John vii. 39). And for this

<sup>1</sup> This opinion is adopted by Tillotson, Waterland, and Samuel Clark, though by the latter somewhat hesitatingly, in their sermons on the Sin against the Holy Ghost.



reason we hold, not only that the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost was not then committed by the Pharisees, but that in reality such a crime could not then be perpetrated. We therefore consider that our Lord's words were addressed to the Pharisees by way of caution or warning to prevent them continuing in the same malicious disposition after the Holy Ghost was poured forth, and the age of the Spirit had commenced. As if He had said : You have heaped upon Me the foulest calumnies ; you have called Me a wine-bibber, a glutton, a Sabbath breaker, a friend and associate of publicans and sinners ; you have represented My miracles as being wrought by the agency of the devil ; you have said that I have an unclean spirit : all this I am willing to overlook, all these sins, and blasphemies, and calumnies I will freely forgive, on your repentance ; but beware of persevering in your opposition to Me and My doctrine after the Holy Ghost is given ; beware of blaspheming Him ; for whosoever speaketh against Him, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in that which is to come.

The sin, then, against which our Lord cautioned the Pharisees, supposing, as we think most probable, His words to be a caution and not a sentence, was the continuance in their opposition to Him and to His doctrine after the Holy Ghost was given. These blasphemies against Him were pardonable ; their malicious disposition had not as yet placed them outside the pale of Divine mercy ; if, however, they

persevered in their opposition after the Holy Ghost was given, they would never have forgiveness, but be guilty of eternal sin. And from this we infer that it is probable that the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is no particular act of sin, but a malicious disposition ; a perseverance in opposition to Christ in spite of the Spirit's influences to overcome that opposition ; an incurable, and therefore an unpardonable, evil disposition ; and this disposition is here called blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, because it consists in a continued resistance to His influences.<sup>1</sup>

This view of the nature of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is further evident, when we consider the allusions to this sin in Scripture. It is true that elsewhere there is no direct mention of this sin. Our Lord's statement is a solitary declaration. But there appear to be indirect allusions to it. This sin is declared by our Lord to be the only unpardonable sin ; now, mention is made in other parts of Scripture of unpardonable sin ; and this would appear to consist in a continued resistance to the Spirit. We have especially three statements on this point ; two in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and one in the first Epistle of St. John. In the Epistle to the Hebrews

<sup>1</sup> This opinion is adopted by Alford, "It is," he observes, "not one particular act of sin which is here condemned, but a *state* of sin, and that state a wilful determined opposition to the present power of the Holy Ghost, as shown by its fruit, *βλασφημία*." To this view, however, it is objected that blasphemy necessarily implies overt acts of sins of speech, and can only be applied to words. But this is not necessarily the case. God may be blasphemed by an ungodly life as well as by profane words.

we read: "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame" (Heb. vi. 4-6). And again: "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (Heb. x. 26-29). And St. John mentions the unpardonable sin, without, however, giving us any intimation as to its nature: "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it" (1 John v. 16). From the statements in the Epistle to the Hebrews, it would appear, that this unpardonable sin consists in an effectual resistance to the Spirit's influences, in wilful transgression after having been made a partaker of the Holy Ghost.

The special work of the Spirit is to deliver us from

our sinful nature, and to produce holiness within us ; but in carrying on this work He acts agreeably to our moral nature ; His influences are exerted on the human will. A man may be convinced by the Spirit of his guilt and danger ; he may be enlightened in the knowledge of Christ as his Saviour ; he may be made a partaker of the Holy Ghost, and feel the influence of the powers of the world to come ; yet, from perverseness of will, he may so effectually resist the influences of the Spirit, that that blessed Agent may retire from his soul, and leave him in a state of hardened impenitence. God's Spirit will not always strive with man ; there is a limit to His forbearance. This is what we conceive to be that disposition of mind, that unpardonable sin, mentioned by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and which we regard as the same as that sin which our Lord calls blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

There are several sins mentioned in Scripture as sins against the Holy Ghost ; indeed, every sin is against the Holy Ghost, as it is opposed to His work in the soul ; but special transgressions are adverted to. There is grieving the Spirit, when we commit any of those sins, or indulge in any of those vices which are the opposite of those graces which it is His office to implant in the soul. There is resisting the Spirit, when we oppose ourselves to His sacred influences, and refuse to submit to His agency. There is quenching the Spirit, when we refuse to hearken to His counsels and to comply

with His secret impressions. And, besides these general statements, particular sins against the Holy Ghost are mentioned. Those Jews were guilty of sinning against the Holy Ghost who, on the day of Pentecost, vilified His operations as the effect of drunkenness, saying, "These men are full of new wine." Ananias and Sapphira sinned against the Holy Ghost, when they attempted to deceive Him by keeping back part of the price of the land; and Simon Magus, when he offered to purchase His miraculous gifts with money. But neither grieving, nor resisting, nor quenching the Spirit; neither the sin of the blaspheming Jews, nor that of Ananias and Sapphira, nor that of Simon Magus, was the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. This is a sin of a still deeper dye, a crime more heinous than any of these; it is not a mere resistance, but a continued resistance, when the Spirit's influences are repeatedly quenched; such a prolonged and obstinate resistance as causes the Spirit to withdraw, and give up the man to a reprobate mind.

Such a continued resistance to the Holy Ghost as we have here described is necessarily unpardonable. The religious principle is gone, the soul is unsusceptible of the influences of the Spirit. The man has effectually cut himself off from God: "he is guilty," as our Saviour emphatically asserts, "of eternal sin" (Mark iii. 29). There is hope of a tree if it be cut down that it will sprout again. But if the tree be wrenched up by the roots, if it be entirely

separated from the ground, no hope can be entertained of its future revival. Without the renewing influences of the Spirit we cannot be saved ; we shall continue in a state of depravity, totally unfit for heaven's happiness and unprepared for heaven's services. We shall want those qualifications without which God has declared that we shall never enter into His kingdom, and without which we cannot enjoy heaven. An efficacious remedy for sin has been provided ; but if a man resist the Spirit, he rejects the remedy. A Saviour mighty to save is indeed proffered ; but if a man refuse to accept Him, if he persevere in his opposition to Him, his sin from the very nature of the case, becomes unpardonable. It is not from the mere arbitrary appointment of God that this blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, this continued resistance to His influences, is unpardonable ; it results from the constitution of things. This is a sin which does in its own nature shut out all remedy ; a sin which could not be forgiven without some change in the immutable nature of God.

It is evident that the unpardonable nature of this sin is no restriction upon the efficacy of Christ's merits. That efficacy is unlimited ; it embraces all sin ; and there is no sinner, however numerous and aggravated his sins may be, who will not receive forgiveness whenever he embraces the Gospel remedy. But herein lies the difference between the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost and all other sins ; the man who is guilty of this sin will not accept Christ as his

Saviour ; hardened impenitence and indifference are the inevitable results of its commission. Although Christ has died to save sinners, although the value of His merits is infinite, yet final unbelief and impenitence are sins which do in their own nature preclude forgiveness. The Gospel remedy to be efficacious must be applied ; if rejected, it cannot be made availing. There are conditions on our part to be performed, and if we do not comply with them we shall perish, not from any want of efficacy in Christ's merits to save us, but because we have rejected the remedy which He has provided. "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The remedy which Christ has provided is a remedy only to those who repent and believe ; and it is in the absence of this repentance and belief that the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost—the continued resistance to His influences which are essential to produce these graces—consists ; and this is the reason why this sin is necessarily unpardonable.<sup>1</sup>

Whether this opinion that the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost resolves itself into a continued resistance to the Spirit be acquiesced in or not, it is evident that such a continued resistance, if persevered in, is unpardonable, and, therefore, is as much to be feared as if it were demonstrated to be the

<sup>1</sup> "The sin against the Holy Ghost is unpardonable, not because God is unwilling to forgive, but because man has become unable to believe that God can forgive."—OLSHAUSEN.

sin mentioned by our Lord. Nor is this sin confined to any particular age of the Church; whilst the Spirit's influences continue, they may be effectually resisted. And, indeed, there are alarming symptoms that such a sin is not so uncommon in the Christian Church, as we may be inclined to suppose. When men continue to resist the Spirit; when they receive the grace of God in vain; when they turn a deaf ear to the invitations of the Gospel, and harden themselves against the convictions of their own conscience; when the Saviour knocks at the door of their hearts, and they refuse Him admission, God may be so provoked as to withdraw from such persons His grace. There is a limit to the patience of God toward sinners, when He swears in His wrath that they shall not enter into His rest. Men, by resisting the Spirit, harden their conscience, increase the measure of their guilt, and seal themselves for condemnation. And, perhaps, this is especially the case with those who, in the language of Scripture, were once enlightened, and had tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have fallen from the faith. We see multitudes living in a state of total indifference, completely unaffected by the solemn truths of religion, and by the awful realities of a future state. We see many given up, in all appearance, to a reprobate mind, who have effectually repressed the warnings of their conscience, and who are living without compunction a life of ungodliness and sin. We see others who



take delight in scoffing at religion, and even blaspheming that Holy Name wherewith we were called.

On the other hand, it is not unusual for scrupulous persons to fear that they have committed the unpardonable sin, and that, consequently, their sins are incapable of being forgiven. This notion, however unreasonable it may appear to a reflecting mind, is not uncommon among those who are naturally of a sensitive and desponding temperament, and who are suffering under convictions of sin.<sup>1</sup> But it may be asserted, as a general maxim, that those who fear that they have committed this sin are removed at the greatest distance from its commission. Whatever be the nature of this sin, hardened impenitence constitutes at least one of its effects. Whoever, therefore, is troubled with the thought that he may have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, proves by his very grief and self-accusation that he has not committed it; for he who is really guilty of it will be secure against all such self-reproaches. So long as religious anxiety exists, the Spirit has not withdrawn from the soul; for the susceptibility to religious impressions is the effect of His sacred influences.

There are some who are troubled with blasphemous

<sup>1</sup> Goethe in his autobiography observes: "I have known several men who, though their manner of thinking and living was perfectly rational, could not free themselves from thinking about the sin against the Holy Ghost, and from the fear that they had committed it."

thoughts, and who are led to fear that these may be the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Such thoughts do strangely and unaccountably enter into our minds, as if they were those fiery darts of the wicked one, about which the apostle speaks (Eph. vi. 16). But if these thoughts enter into our minds against our will ; if they are not harboured, but resisted by us ; if they are to us a grief and vexation, so far from being the unpardonable sin, they appear to be no sins at all, but the effects of some mental or bodily disorder, or else the solicitations of evil spirits. It is only when the will goes along with evil thoughts, when, instead of resisting we cherish them, that they are sinful.

Upon the whole there is nothing in the statement of our Lord concerning the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, to perplex and annoy the scrupulous, though there is much to warn and alarm the careless and indifferent ; and especially there is much to urge us not to trifle with our religious convictions, but to follow the intimations of the Spirit ; and to all there is a pressing exhortation to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

## EXPOSITION II.

### OUR LORD'S BLESSING TO PETER.

MATTHEW xvi. 18, 19.

*Textus receptus.*—Κἀγὼ δέ σοι λέγω, ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, καὶ πύλαι ᾧδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς. Καὶ δώσω σοι τὰς κλεῖς τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν· καὶ ὃ ἐὰν δῆσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ἔσται δεδεμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· καὶ ὃ ἐὰν λύσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ἔσται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

*Authorised Version.*—And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

*Revised Version.*—And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

THE occasion of this declaration of our Lord is as follows. The time in the course of His ministry had arrived, when He was to demand from His disciples a confession of their belief in Him as the Messiah.

Henceforth He was to appear to them in that capacity. Accordingly He put the question to them, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" The assumption of this Messianic title, the "Son of Man," was a plain declaration on His part that He was the Messiah. In answer to this question the apostles replied: Some, entertaining the opinion suggested by the fears of Herod, say that thou art John the Baptist; others, adopting the Jewish notion of the advent of Elijah as the forerunner of the Messiah, say that thou art Elias; others, in accordance with the prevalent tradition that Jeremiah was to come and reveal the place where the sacred vessels were concealed (2 Macc. ii. 1-7), say that thou art Jeremias; and others, generally and indefinitely, that thou art a prophet, perhaps the herald of the Messiah. "Then said He to them, But whom say ye that I am?" St. Peter, with his usual impetuosity, replied, "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And then our Lord, in testimony of His approbation of this confession and of its significance, replied: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." It was a great crisis in

the history of the Church, being the first announcement made by our Lord of His Messianic character; that He was the King of the souls of men; the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

The consideration of these words are of special importance, as upon their meaning depends the true idea of the Christian Church. On them chiefly the Romanists build the assumption of the supremacy of their pontiff; holding that, as the successor of St. Peter and of the supremacy conferred on him, the Pope of Rome exercises supreme authority in the Catholic Church, and that all who do not belong to the Romish Church are not members of the true Church. On the other hand, many Protestant divines have been more solicitous to elude those inferences, which are supposed to be deducible from this declaration of our Lord, than careful to find out its true meaning. Hence there is hardly any passage of Scripture on which there has been so much controversial writing, and the meaning of which has been more keenly disputed.

Some suppose that our Lord's words were not addressed to St. Peter as an individual, but to St. Peter as the representative of the apostles.<sup>1</sup> They assert that St. Peter on several occasions spoke as the representative of the apostles, as at the election of a

<sup>1</sup> This opinion was not adopted to escape the inferences of the Roman Church, for it was held by Chrysostom, Jerome, and others of the early Fathers. In recent times it has been adopted by Olshausen, Schaff, and other divines of the Protestant Church.

successor to Judas, on the day of Pentecost, and in the defence before the Jewish Sanhedrim, and that he is always represented as foremost in speech. Accordingly, they think that this was the case on the present occasion ; that, consequently, the blessings conferred by our Lord were extended to and equally bestowed upon the rest of the apostles ; so that the privilege of being a rock on which the Church was built, the custody of the keys, and the power of binding and loosing on earth with such effect as shall be ratified in heaven—that these blessings, whatever their meaning may be, were not conferred on St. Peter alone, but were at this time and by these words bestowed on all the apostles. St. Peter, in the name of the apostles, replied, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God ;” and our Lord’s answer was to St. Peter as the representative of the apostles.

This view is exposed to several insuperable objections. There is nothing in the context or in the words to show that St. Peter here acted as the spokesman of the apostles, but much that is opposed to this opinion. To the previous question, “Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am ?” all the apostles in general reply, “Some say that Thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias ; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.” But to the question, “Whom say ye that I am ?” St. Peter alone replied, “Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” If St. Peter replied in the name of the rest of the apostles, it is not probable that the form of the narrative would

have been changed. Besides, our Lord's answer to this confession of St. Peter intimates that He addressed St. Peter as an individual. He called him by his peculiar name, as if to mark him out from all the other apostles, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Here, then, is a precise definite address, for to St. Peter, and to St. Peter alone, did the title Simon Bar-jona belong. On another occasion St. Peter was addressed in a similar manner, when assuredly none of the twelve were included. When, after his denial, our Lord restored him to his apostolic office, he then addressed him in the words, "Simon, son of Jonas (Bar-jona), lovest thou Me?" And from the terms in which the blessing was pronounced, it is evident that St. Peter only was addressed. Our Lord said unto him, "Thou art Peter" (*σὺ εἶ Πέτρος*), that is, thou art rightly called *πέτρος*, a rock, for thou hast that about thee which that name imports, "and on this rock" (*ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ*) "will I build My Church." It is to be observed that not Peter, but Simon, was the original name of that apostle; Peter was a name previously conferred on him by our Lord. When called to the apostleship, Jesus said unto him, "Thou art Simon Bar-jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation Peter" (John i. 42). It is therefore evident that these words were addressed to St. Peter alone, and that our Lord could not include the rest of the twelve in this appellation, for He had

never conferred it on any of them ; it was peculiar to Simon the son of Jonas. It amounts, then, nearly to actual demonstration that St. Peter spoke for himself, and that the words of our Lord were addressed to him as an individual, and not as the representative of the apostles.

But though the words were addressed to St. Peter alone, yet it is a different question, What was the rock to which Christ alluded when He said, "Upon this rock will I build My Church"? The opinions on this point are various. Some suppose that our Lord referred to Himself.<sup>1</sup> The arguments by which this view is defended are as follows. The Lord Jesus Christ, and not any mere man, is the foundation of His Church. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." And the difference between the rock on which the Church is built and St. Peter is intimated in the text. When our Lord addressed St. Peter, the word is masculine *Πέτρος* ; but when He spoke of the rock on which He was to build His Church, it is feminine *πέτρα*. Now *πέτρος* means not a rock, but a stone, whereas *πέτρα* is a rock. St. Peter was a living stone, as he himself says (1 Pet. ii. 5), of the spiritual temple built upon Christ, the Rock, the sure foundation. Hence it is supposed that when our Lord said, "Upon this rock will I build My Church," He pointed to Himself as the great and only foundation. On

<sup>1</sup> This view was adopted by Augustine and Jerome, among the Fathers and is ably advocated by Bishop Wordsworth.



another occasion our Lord spoke in a similar manner. When He cast out the oxen and sheep out of the temple, the Jews said unto Him, "What sign showest Thou unto us, seeing Thou doest these things? Jesus answered, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again." The most natural interpretation of this was that He would destroy the temple of Jerusalem and rebuild it in three days, and so the Jews understood Him; but the evangelist corrects their mistake and informs us that He spoke of the temple of His body (John ii. 18-21). So here it is affirmed, when Christ said, "Upon this rock will I build My Church," perhaps the most natural interpretation may be to refer the rock to St. Peter; yet He alluded not to St. Peter, but to Himself, the only foundation upon which His Church is built.

Now assuredly it is most true, that in a peculiar and incommunicable sense Christ is the only foundation of His Church, seeing that there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved. But in a different and subordinate sense men are called foundations (Eph. ii. 20; Rev. xxi. 14). Nor is there much force in the distinction of the words *πέτρος* and *πέτρα*. *Πέτρος* is in the masculine, because it refers to Peter. And we must remember that our Lord spoke not in Greek but in Aramaic, and that in that language there is no distinction in the words. And although in Greek *πέτρος* may generally mean a stone, and *πέτρα* a rock; yet here from the

allusion to the name of the apostle, *πέτρος* must mean a rock; as Bengel remarks, "*Πέτρος* alias denotat *lapidem*; sed in Simone *petram*." And besides, the emphatic pronoun this (*ταύτη*) is made to refer to something not stated, that our Lord laid His hand on His breast, when he said, Upon *this* rock will I build My Church. So that in the absence of any explanatory intimation by the evangelist, we must consider the view which refers the rock to Christ Himself as forced and unnatural.

A somewhat similar, but more plausible meaning, is that the confession which St. Peter made, that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the living God, is the rock on which the Church was to be built.<sup>1</sup> The essential doctrines of Christianity may well be termed foundations on which the Church is built; deny them and the Church can have no existence. Now the confession of St. Peter, that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God, lies at the foundation of Christianity; disbelief in it would overturn the whole scheme of redemption. The name of the apostle *Πέτρος* received its realisation in this confession, and hence to this our Lord alluded, when he said, "On this rock will I build My Church." "We have already seen," observes Bishop Horsley, "that the reason of the name of Peter, given to Simon, lay in the confession which he then made. In that con-

<sup>1</sup> This opinion was the one generally adopted by the Fathers, and has in recent times been adopted by Calvin, Ewald, Wieseler, Forscheammer, and Horsley.

fession, therefore, we must see the rocky thing to which the name alluded."<sup>1</sup>

What is here stated is readily admitted as true, namely, that the doctrines contained in the confession of St. Peter—the Messiahship and Divine Sonship of our Lord—lie at the foundation of Christianity. But that our Lord alludes to this, as the rock mentioned in our passage, is far from obvious. If this be the meaning, the emphatic words lose their force; for it is evident that they refer not to the confession of St. Peter, but to St. Peter himself. Besides it is not the usual language of Scripture that the Church is founded on confessions and doctrines, but on living persons—on Christ Himself or, in a subordinate sense, on His apostles. And the whole context is against this meaning. The blessing is not pronounced so much on the confession of St. Peter, as on St. Peter himself who makes that confession: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona."

The only natural interpretation is that which refers the rock, on which Christ builds His Church, to St. Peter himself. This is the opinion adopted not only by the Romanists, but by most recent critics and commentators.<sup>2</sup> It is certainly the one most agreeable with the connection and the sense of the passage; and is assuredly not to be rejected, merely because it appears to militate against our preconceived opinions.

<sup>1</sup> Horsley's Works, vol. i. p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> As Bengel, Doddridge, Whitby, Macknight, Ebrard, Meyer, Alford, Farrar, Mansel, and others.

There is in the passage an evident play upon words ; a paranomasia which is not seen in our version ; the *πέτρος* in the first clause refers to the *πέτρα* in the second ; so that the words might be rendered : “ I say unto thee that thou art indeed a rock (*πέτρος*), and upon this rock (*πέτρα*) will I build My Church.” It is assuredly most natural to refer the emphatic pronoun *this* to the rock previously mentioned ; that rock was St. Peter, being his name, and the rock afterwards mentioned is a manifest allusion to that name. The whole beauty and force of the allusion would be lost, and the meaning of the passage rendered obscure, if we did not adopt this interpretation. Similar allusions to names are common in the Old Testament. As when God said to Abraham ; “ Thy name shall be Abraham, for a father of many nations have I made thee ” (Gen. xvii. 5) ; and to Jacob, “ Thy name shall be called no more Jacob but Israel, for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed ” (Gen. xxxii. 28). So here, in precisely the same manner, it may be said : “ Thy name shall be called Peter ; for on this rock will I build My Church.” “ The Lord,” observes Tertullian ; “ said to Peter, Upon this rock I will build My Church. In Peter himself the Church was reared ; that is, through Peter himself.”

The interpretation then most agreeable with the connection of the passage, the natural meaning of the verse, the force of the allusion to the name Peter, and the grammatical structure, is to refer the rock on

which the Church was built to St. Peter; *σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πετρᾷ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν.* But the question naturally arises, In what sense can it be said that St. Peter is the rock on which the Church is built? To this it is replied, that St. Peter may be considered as the rock on which the Church is built, inasmuch as by his preaching and zeal the Gospel was diffused, and the way of access into the Church of Christ was opened up both to Jews and Gentiles. The doctrine taught by this apostle, as is contained in the epistles which bear his name, is also the foundation of our faith. But to be a foundation in this sense was not an honour peculiar to St. Peter; but, as we elsewhere learn both from Scripture and from history, was shared in by the other apostles. They also, by their zealous efforts, propagated the Gospel, and by their doctrine, which is handed down to us in the epistles which bear their names, laid the foundation of our faith. Thus we are informed that the Church is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets (Eph. ii. 20); and that the wall of the spiritual Jerusalem had twelve foundations, and on them the names written of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Rev. xxi. 14). Some of the apostles were pre-eminent for their zeal and success, and among them St. Peter was conspicuous. He came forward on several occasions as the spokesman of the apostles; it was he who took the chief part in addressing the assembled multitudes on the day of Pentecost, and who was commissioned by a

divine revelation to preach the Gospel to Cornelius. Still, however, he was not the Rock, but only a rock, a principal foundation-stone of the building of God—a firm and eminent part in the foundation of apostles and prophets. “You say,” says Jerome, “that the Church is founded on Peter ; but the same in another place is said of all the apostles.”

The apostles are only foundations of the Church of God in a subordinate sense. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the chief, and as regards our hopes of salvation, the only foundation of His Church. “Christ,” says Jerome, “was the Rock, and He bestowed it upon His apostles to be called rocks also.” Hence also St. Paul says, “Ye are built upon the foundations of apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. ii. 20, 21). Christ is the foundation stone spoken of in the Psalms and in the Prophets: “Behold I lay in Sion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation” (Isa. xxviii. 16). The apostles, and Peter especially, were rocks, inasmuch as they are eminent supports of our faith, and the pillars of the Church in their day and generation, but Christ alone is the rock of our salvation. “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. iii. 11).

Our Lord adds: “And the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it,” *καὶ πύλαι ᾗδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς*. *ᾗδης* is the well known Greek term, signifying the invisible state, the abode of the dead. In the Septuagint it is the translation of Sheol, a word of the

same import. The translation of it in our Authorised Version by *hell* is peculiarly unfortunate, as the idea conveyed by Hades is different from the future state of punishment. For this another word *γέεννα* is usually employed in the New Testament. Hades is often represented as an abode; hence we read in Scripture of the house of Hades, of the keys of Hades, and here of the gates of Hades. We are here informed that the gates of Hades (*πύλαι ᾗδου*) shall not prevail against the Church of Christ. Some suppose that by this expression is meant the power of Hades; but this is a very unusual meaning of the word *gates*.<sup>1</sup> It is best to refer it to death. Death is the entrance into Hades, and therefore the gates or entrance of Hades denote death. The expression may accordingly denote that death will not destroy the Church of Christ. The Church will never become extinct; on the contrary one generation of Christians shall arise after another even to the end of time; a promise which has as yet been most amply and fully verified. Or, perhaps, there is an allusion to the resurrection of the just. Hades shall not retain those consigned to it; the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death; the closed gates of Hades shall at length be thrown open, and the ransomed souls of the saints shall issue forth to be united with their raised bodies, and thus to participate in the resurrection of the just.

The blessing pronounced on St. Peter is twofold, the custody of the keys, and the authority to bind and

<sup>1</sup> Thus we speak of the Ottoman, or Sublime Porte.

loose on earth with such effect as shall be ratified in heaven. The first privilege mentioned is the custody of the keys. "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven ;" *Δώσω σοι τὰς κλεῖς τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν.* The kingdom of heaven is the same as the Church of Christ. "On this rock will I build My Church." The most natural meaning of the metaphor employed is, that to St. Peter was to be assigned the privilege of granting admission into the Church. Our Lord here represents His Church under the image of a fortress built upon a rock, and to St. Peter was consigned the keys of this fortress. Thus it is said of Eliakim : "And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder" (Isa. xxii. 22) ; he was to have the power of admitting to or excluding from the king's palace. So St. Peter was to exercise the same power with reference to the Church of Christ. Under the Mosaic dispensation, the Church of God was barred ; the gates were closed against the Gentiles, and in a great measure against the Jews themselves ; but these bars and hindrances were to be removed, the gates were to be thrown open, the Jewish dispensation was to come to an end, the Church of God was no longer to be confined to a particular nation, but to embrace the whole world. St. Peter is here commanded, by the special favour of Christ, to open the kingdom of heaven for the admission of mankind. And this commission he executed, being the first of all the apostles to preach the Gospel both to Jews and Gentiles. When the day of Pentecost was come, St.



Peter, we are told, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and addressed the Jews with such success that on that day three thousand were added to the Church. And he also was fixed upon by divine revelation to open the Church to the Gentiles, when he preached the Gospel to Cornelius and his company, the first Gentile converts. Hence, in the council of Jerusalem, he said: "Men and brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the Gospel and believe" (Acts xv. 7).

The second privilege conferred on St. Peter was the power of binding and loosing on earth with such an effect as shall be ratified in heaven: *καὶ ὃ ἐὰν δήσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ἔσται δεδεμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· καὶ ὃ ἐὰν λύσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ἔσται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.* Some consider that this privilege contains an explanation of what is meant by "the keys of the kingdom of heaven," and that the clauses are in apposition: but it is more natural to consider them as different privileges. Now, although the custody of the keys—the privilege of opening the Church—was peculiar to St. Peter, being conferred on him as an individual; yet this second privilege, whatever its meaning may be, was extended to all the apostles. The same evangelist who records the promise made to St. Peter, mentions the extension of the same promise to all the apostles: "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall

be loosed in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 18). The explanation given of the words *bind* and *loose* are various; the general meaning assigned to them is to *forbid* and *allow*; <sup>1</sup> but they would rather seem to mean to *retain* and *remit*. For example, the apostles exercised this power in loosing the obligation of the Mosaic law in the ceremonial, and in binding it in the moral part; and with reference to the Gentiles, they bound them to some precepts and loosed them from others. "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than those necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication" (Acts xv. 28, 29). Thus, their binding and loosing on earth was ratified by the Holy Ghost in heaven. So, also, St. Paul exercised this authority when he inflicted miraculous punishment on Elymas; and St. Peter, when he loosed the lame man of his infirmity at the beautiful gate of the temple. St. Peter did so when he baptised Cornelius and his household, and admitted them into the Church of Christ; and St. Paul, when he excommunicated the incestuous person at Corinth, delivering him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord. It does not appear, however, that this authority extended to the retention and remission of sins; except so far as there are traces of an apostolic power of inflicting miraculous punishment

<sup>1</sup> See Meyer *in loco*. Mansel in the Speaker's Commentary.

on the obdurate, and of removing them from the penitent (Acts xiii. 11 ; 1 Cor. v. 5 ; Jas. v. 15).

It is matter of great controversy whether this blessing of our Lord to St. Peter conferred on him any supremacy above the other apostles. This is maintained by the Roman Catholic divines, and is admitted by many Protestants. Thus Meyer observes : " There can be no doubt whatever that the *primacy* among the apostles is here assigned to Peter, inasmuch as Christ singles him out as one in particular whose apostolic labours will, in virtue of the *steadfast faith* for which he is peculiarly distinguished, be the means of securing, so far as human effort can do so, the permanence and stability of the Church which Jesus is about to found, and to extend it more and more in the world. As in accordance with this, we may also mention the precedence given to this disciple in the catalogues of the apostles, and likewise the fact that the New Testament uniformly represents him as being, in point of fact, superior to all the others (Acts xv. 7 ; ii. 14 ; Gal. i. 18 ; ii. 7, 8)." But this remark must be taken with considerable limitation ; that St. Peter had a certain priority among the apostles is admitted, but it was a priority of order and not of authority, and even that priority was temporary and not permanent. The privilege of being a rock on which the Church was to be built, and the power of binding and loosing were not conferred on him alone, but on all the apostles. The custody of the keys gave him no authority

over the rest, and besides, was of a temporary and not of a permanent nature. Our Lord discountenanced all idea of the supremacy and authority of one apostle over the rest. "The princes of this world," He says, "exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them; but it shall not be so among you, for whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. xx. 25-27). He gave to His apostles the same commission, and invested them with the same powers; and when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory, they shall also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Nor did the apostles understand that these words of our Lord granted to St. Peter any authority over them, for there is no trace of it in the history of the Church. On the contrary, we find them afterwards disputing among themselves who should be the greatest. In the council of Jerusalem, it was St. James, not St. Peter, who presided. St. Peter, instead of sending the other apostles, was sent by them (Acts viii. 14). St. Paul, so far from considering that St. Peter had any supremacy, rebuked him when guilty of dissimulation at Antioch. And after the council of Jerusalem, St. Peter steps into the background, and is seldom mentioned in the New Testament.

But, whether our Lord's blessing conferred a supremacy on St. Peter or not, certainly no argument can be drawn from the words to justify the preten-

sions of the Church of Rome. These pretensions rest on the assertion that a supremacy over the apostles was granted to St. Peter; that St. Peter, as bishop of Rome, transmitted all his authority and power to the Roman pontiffs, who are his successors. It is, however, a matter of considerable doubt whether St. Peter was ever at Rome; certainly the Church of Rome was not founded by him; there is no allusion to him in the Epistles of St. Paul written from that city, and the earliest Fathers are silent on the matter.<sup>1</sup> But, admitting that our Lord's blessing gave to St. Peter a supremacy over the other apostles, and further admitting that St. Peter was bishop of Rome, it is an immense leap from these premisses to the conclusion that he transmitted his powers to the bishops of Rome. The blessing was limited to St. Peter; the words were addressed to him as an individual, to the exclusion of the apostles his contemporaries, and much more of the Roman pontiffs who pretend to be his successors. Besides, the assumption that the Roman pontiff possesses the supremacy granted to St. Peter involves in it this manifest absurdity, that the Apostle John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who also leaned upon His breast at supper, must have been subordinate and subject to the bishop of Rome during the years he survived the martyrdom of St. Peter. The pretensions of the Church of Rome founded on this passage are evidently baseless and

<sup>1</sup> There is, however, some reason to suppose that by Babylon mentioned in 1 Peter v. 13, the city of Rome is meant.

extravagant. Whatever be its meaning, it certainly cannot possibly denote that our Lord had in view either the Roman pontiffs as the successors of St. Peter, or the supremacy of the Church of Rome.

## EXPOSITION III.

### SALTED WITH FIRE.

MARK ix. 49.

*Textus receptus.*—Πᾶς γὰρ πυρὶ ἀλισθήσεται, καὶ πᾶσα θυσία ἀλὶ ἀλισθήσεται.

*Authorised Version.*—For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.

*Revised Version.*—For every one shall be salted with fire.

THE text selected for exposition is one of much difficulty, as may be seen from the vast variety of interpretations which have been given to it. It is certainly the most obscure passage in the gospel of St. Mark. To whom do the words "every one" (πᾶς) allude? Are they to be taken absolutely to denote all mankind, or are they limited by the context to a particular class? And if limited, to what class, to the wicked or to believers? What is denoted by the apparently incongruous expression "salted with fire" (πυρὶ ἀλισθήσεται)? What fire is alluded to? Is it the fire of Gehenna into which the wicked are cast, or the fire of trial by which the righteous are purified? What is meant by the salt with which every sacrifice

is salted? And what idea has to be attached to the term salted? These are questions which have been very differently answered. The omission of the second clause, as in the Revised Version, somewhat lessens the difficulty, since it gives greater freedom to the interpretation; but it does so only to a limited extent, as the main difficulty is contained in the first clause, "For every one shall be salted with fire." To attain to the correct interpretation, we must carefully attend to the context, with which the text is joined by the conjunction "for" (*γὰρ*); assigning a reason for what our Saviour had just said. And, supposing both clauses to be genuine, we must be careful to maintain a uniform meaning of the metaphorical term "salted" (*ἀλισθήσεται*) in both its applications "salted with fire" and "salted with salt." By these methods the obscurity of the passage may be removed and a correct meaning obtained.

The first thing to be done is to settle the text. The Revised Version omits the second clause, but appends the following marginal note: "Many ancient authorities add *and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt*. See Lev. ii. 13." Here, however, we consider the Revised Version in error: the decided preponderance of authorities is in favour of the retention of the clause. In favour of its omission are only the two celebrated MSS., the Vatican and the Sinaitic, two other uncial (L. Δ), and about eleven cursive MSS. The Vatican and Sinaitic belong to the same recension, indeed Tischendorf affirms that the writer of the Vatican was



employed in writing part of the Sinaitic, a statement which, however, appears highly improbable ; so that these MSS. are almost to be considered as one witness. On the other hand, the words are contained in fifteen uncial MSS., among which are the important MSS., the Codex Alexandrinus, the Codex Ephræmi, and the Codex Bezaë, in the great majority of the cursive MSS., and in the most important versions—the old Italic, the Peshito, and the Vulgate. The external evidence being so decidedly in favour of the passage, little weight is to be attached to the internal evidence. It is affirmed that Lev. ii. 13 suggested the clause ; but, whatever probability is in this, it is outweighed by the consideration that the clause augments the difficulty of exegesis, and that it is in direct connection with what follows : “ Salt is good,” namely, the salt by which every sacrifice is salted, “ but if the salt has lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it ? ” The words are retained by Griesbach, Lachmann, Meyer, Alford, and Tischendorf in his seventh edition ; and are rejected by Tischendorf in his eighth edition, in which the Sinaitic MS. exercises an undue influence, and by Westcott and Hort, on whose text chiefly the Revised Version is formed.

The exegesis of the passage is as follows. *For* (γὰρ), the connecting particle joins the words with what precedes, assigning a reason for them. Some restrict it to the last clause, “ *their* worm dieth not,” and refer what follows to the previous *αὐτῶν* ; but others, more naturally, extend it to the entire paragraph—to the

denunciations or warnings of our Lord. *Every one* (πᾶς), by some taken absolutely, by others restricted by the context: this will be the subject of future determination. *Shall be salted* (ἁλισθήσεται): the verb ἁλίζω signifies to salt, to sprinkle or season with salt; here it is evidently to be taken in a metaphorical sense; which may either be “to preserve” or “to purify”—salt being in Scripture the symbol of Divine grace—only we must be careful to retain the same meaning in both clauses. *With fire* (πυρὶ): both datives πυρὶ and ἀλλ̄ are to be taken instrumentally; and therefore πυρὶ is not “for the fire,” but “with fire.” This may either be the fire of Gehenna, as in the former verse (τὸ πῦρ, verse 48), or the fire of trial (1 Cor. iii. 13), or the fire of purification (1 Peter i. 7), depending upon the meaning assigned to the rest of the clause. *And* (καὶ), the simple copulative, uniting the two clauses; not to be rendered “just as” (ὥς), according to some, or “but” (δὲ) according to others; there does not appear to be any antithesis between the clauses. *Every sacrifice* (πᾶσα θυσία), to be taken metaphorically, not to be applied to actual sacrifices, but denoting men or their acts of self-denial. *Shall be salted with salt* (ἀλί ἁλισθήσεται); salt being an essential part in the Jewish sacrifices.

In the last clause, “salted with salt,” we have a distinct reference to the custom under the Mosaic law of sprinkling the meat-offerings with salt. It is not improbable that our Lord quotes the words from Leviticus ii. 13: “And every oblation of thy meat-

offering shalt thou season with salt ; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat-offering ; with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt." Salt appears to be the emblem of consecration ; it was so used, not only by the Jews, but by the heathen in their religious services. The meat-offering salted with salt was thus solemnly consecrated to God, set apart from a common to a sacred use, and thus legally purified. Salt, also, is the emblem of perpetuity, and hence we read of a covenant of salt—a perpetual covenant. "All the heave-offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the Lord, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever : it is a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord unto thee and to thy seed with thee" (Num. xviii. 19). "Ought ye not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?" (2 Chron. xiii. 5). And hence the sacrificial salt is called the salt of the covenant (Lev. ii. 13).

There are several interpretations which may be dismissed without further consideration as being highly improbable, contrary to the context, or linguistically inadmissible. Thus some apply both clauses to the lost, and understand the word *salted* in the sense of preserved. "For," introducing the reason of the eternal punishment of the condemned, "every one," that is every one of the condemned, "shall be salted with fire"—shall be preserved from

annihilation in the fire of Gehenna—"and," or just as, "every sacrifice shall be salted"—preserved from corruption—"with salt." This interpretation is too horrible to be admitted, and is in direct opposition to what follows. "Salt is good," which evidently supposes the salt, with which the sacrifice is salted, as a figure for something that is good; and, besides, the salt of the sacrifice was under the law the emblem of consecration to God, and not of eternal destruction.

Another interpretation is to translate *πύρι* "for the fire." "Every one shall be salted for the fire;" but denoting thereby, not the fire of Gehenna, but the sacrifice of consecration. Every one shall be salted for the fire of God's altar; that is, shall be prepared to be offered a sacrifice to God, holy and acceptable, as every sacrifice is salted with salt; in contrast to the condition of the wicked, who shall be consumed in the unquenchable fire.<sup>1</sup> This gives a pleasing interpretation, and one to which we would gladly assent, but it is grammatically inadmissible. It gives a different rendering to the two datives *πυρὶ* and *ἀλὶ*—salted *for* the fire and salted *with* salt, both must be taken instrumentally, "with fire" and "with salt."

Dismissing these then, and other interpretations, there are three which require special attention, each depending on the meaning to be assigned to *πᾶς*, "every one": by one class of critics, the word is limited to the wicked; by a second class, it is under-

<sup>1</sup> The view taken by Macknight.

stood absolutely ; and by a third class, it is restricted to believers.

I. The first class of critics limit  $\pi\hat{\alpha}\varsigma$  to the wicked. They suppose that the fire must be the same as that mentioned in the previous verse—the fire of Gehenna, and hence they consider  $\pi\hat{\alpha}\varsigma$  to be limited by the context—every one of those whose worm dieth not, and whose fire is not quenched—that is every one of the impenitent—shall be salted with fire. And the second clause is supposed to be a contrast to the former “every sacrifice”—every one who has dedicated himself to God “shall be salted with salt”—solemnly consecrated and accepted by God. The wicked are likened to the burnt-offering, which is salted with fire—wholly consumed ; the righteous are likened to the meat-offering, which is salted with salt—consecrated to God. There are, according to this view, two antitheses : the condemned sinner, reserved for Gehenna, and the believer, the acceptable sacrifice ; fire as the instrument of the punishment of the wicked, and salt as the emblem of the purification of the believer.<sup>1</sup> The whole sentence is thus paraphrased by Meyer : “With warrant I speak of their *fire* (ver. 48) ; for *every one* of those who come into Gehenna *will be salted* therein *with fire*,—that is, none of them will escape the doom of having represented in him, by means of fire, that which is done

<sup>1</sup> This opinion has been adopted by Grotius, Kuinoel, Doddridge, Lightfoot, Whitby, and especially Meyer, the greatest of our modern exegetes.

in sacrifices by means of salt, namely, the imperishable validity of the divine covenant; *and every sacrifice*, that is every pious man unseparated, who, as such, resembles a (pure) sacrifice *shall be salted with salt*, that is shall, at his entrance into the Messianic kingdom by reception of higher wisdom, represent in himself that validity of the divine covenant; as in the case of the actual sacrifice this is effected by its becoming salted."

Such an interpretation is liable to great objections.

1. It appears to be artificial and unnatural. The limitation of  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$  to the  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\omega}\nu$  of the previous verse, "their worm dieth not" is forced and unnecessary.  $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$  evidently refers to the whole previous statement, giving the reason why we should make sacrifices—cut off our foot or hand, and pluck out our eye, in order to escape falling into Gehenna.
2. It does not give a uniform meaning to the word *salted*. In the second clause, *salted* denotes consecrated to God; but it has not this meaning in the first clause, it rather denotes preserved for punishment.
3. It supposes a contrast or antithesis to exist between the first and second clauses which is not suggested by the text; the simple copulative  $\kappa\alpha\iota$ , and not the adversative copula  $\delta\epsilon$  being employed. The antithesis would require to be expressed by "burned with fire" and "salted with salt."
4. It almost necessitates us to use the datives in different senses. Salted, that is preserved *for* the fire; salted, that is consecrated *with* salt.
5. And lastly, the meaning

given to the first clause is a meaning which one shrinks to adopt—preserved alive, notwithstanding the consuming nature of fire.

II. A second class of critics understand  $\pi\hat{\alpha}\varsigma$  absolutely, as denoting every man. They consider that there is no necessary limitation expressed in the context, and that  $\pi\hat{\alpha}\varsigma$  is consequently to be taken generally: every one without exception—believers as well as the wicked—“shall be salted with fire.” According to this view, the fire mentioned is not the fire of Gehenna, but the fire of trial which shall test the character of all. Fire is in Scripture the symbol of the Divine purity and presence. “Our God is a consuming fire,” not only to the wicked but to His people; a fire which consumes the dross, but leaves untouched the pure metal. This emblem is frequently employed in Scripture: “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold which perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. i. 7). “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Pet. iv. 12). All are tried in the fire—salted with fire—cast into the furnace. To the righteous the fire is purifying; it burns up all that is impure, consumes the dross, so that they come forth from it as gold tested in the furnace. But to the wicked the fire is penal; if there is nothing but dross, no precious metal, it will only consume. To the righteous the very fire

of trial becomes a consecrating salt ; every sacrifice is salted with salt—purified unto the Lord ; not only are the persons themselves accepted, but the sacrifices which they have made, their acts of self-denial for the sake of religion ; the fire is converted into the salt of divine grace—a salt which must carefully be preserved. “Salt is good ; but if the salt has lost his saltness wherewith shall it be salted.” Hence, according to this interpretation, the meaning of the words is as follows : “If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out : it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire : where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched : for,” as a reason assigned for this admonition, “every one,” both the wicked and the righteous, “shall be salted with fire”—both shall pass through a fiery trial ; in the case of the wicked, the fire is penal, in the case of the righteous it is purifying, and becomes as the salt of consecration ; “and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt,” purified and preserved for God.<sup>1</sup> Thus Olshausen observes : “The sense of the expression is this : because of the general sinfulness of the race, every individual must be salted with fire, either on the one hand by his entering voluntarily on a course of self-denial and earnest purification from his iniquities, or on the other hand by being carried involuntarily into the place of punishment ; and therefore (in order to be a sym-

<sup>1</sup> This opinion has been adopted by Bengel, Olshausen, Dean Bickersteth, Schaff, and Alford.



bolical type of this spiritual transaction) every sacrifice is (as it is written) to be salted with salt."

This interpretation is more plausible and appropriate than the former. It gives the full meaning to  $\pi\hat{\alpha}\varsigma$ ; and affords a sense in which "every one is salted with fire." The fire tries all without exception, both those who deny themselves, and those who are cast into the fire of Gehenna. Still, however, it is not free from objections. The term salted ( $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\iota\sigma\theta\acute{\eta}\sigma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ ), is not used in the same sense in both clauses; in the first clause it denotes tried or tested, a meaning which does not belong to it in Scripture. Salt there denotes purification or consecration, but not trial; whereas, in the second clause, it retains its proper metaphorical meaning, consecration for God. Besides no satisfactory meaning can be given to the second clause;  $\pi\hat{\alpha}\varsigma$  in the first clause is used in an unrestricted sense, whereas in the second clause, in  $\pi\hat{\alpha}\sigma\alpha$   $\theta\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\alpha$ , it is necessarily restricted to the righteous. Of course if this second clause be omitted, the meaning assigned to the first clause would be less liable to objection; but the authorities in favour of the retention of that clause are so preponderant, that, notwithstanding the reading of the Authorised Version, it cannot be considered as an interpolation.

III. The third class of critics limit  $\pi\hat{\alpha}\varsigma$  to believers.  $\Pi\hat{\alpha}\varsigma$ , according to this view, is not to be taken absolutely, but is limited by the context. Just as in the clauses "every one that heareth the word," "every one who is perfect shall be as his Master," "every man at the

beginning doth set forth good wine," the general term *πᾶς* is necessarily limited; so is it in the clause, "every one shall be salted with fire." The meaning being, "every one who is salted shall be salted with fire." Now, in the New Testament, salt, when employed metaphorically, is always used in a good sense, as the emblem of purification or consecration, or as a metaphor for the grace of God. Thus St. Paul says, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. iv. 6). And our Lord, addressing His disciples, says, "Ye are the salt of the earth" (Matt. v. 13), preserving it from corruption. And in the verse following our text, it is said: "Salt is good. Have salt in yourselves and have peace one with another." Hence then, "shall be salted" (*ἀλισθησεται*) must denote shall be consecrated or purified; and consequently it follows that the fire (*πυρὶ*) here mentioned cannot be the fire of Gehenna or of eternal punishment, but the purifying fire of trial—that fire which purifies but does not consume. The words, then, are to be taken as expressing a reason why the believer should submit to trials and acts of self-denial for the sake of religion. "It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed than having two hands or two feet to be cast into hell fire; for such acts of self-denial are essential, because every one who is salted or purified, must be salted or purified with fire—the fire of conflict and of trial—he must submit to these acts of self-denial; and every sacrifice, every one who consecrates himself to God or denies himself

for His sake, shall be salted or purified with salt, with divine grace." The importance of self-sacrifice is here insisted on; we must cut off our right hand or right foot, or pluck out our right eye, if called upon, rather than incur the danger of being cast into hell fire.<sup>1</sup> "According to Mark's gospel," observes Calvin, "our Lord, having spoken of eternal fire, exhorts His own people, on the contrary, to offer themselves now to God to be seasoned *with fire and salt*, that they may be devoted sacrifices, and that they may not draw down upon themselves by their sins that *fire* which is never extinguished."

This interpretation we consider to be the correct one; it is agreeable to the context, giving the reason why we should make painful sacrifices for religion; it retains the same meaning of *ἀλισθήσεται*, *shall be purified*, in both clauses; and it enforces a lesson upon the disciples, full of importance and yet hard to accept, that we must be purified by trial. In conformity with this meaning, the passage may thus be paraphrased: "Let it not seem to you a hard saying that I require painful acts of self-denial, for every one of you, my disciples, must, as it were, be salted with fire, pass through the fire of tribulation in order to be purified, and, as with the sacrifices under the law, every sacrifice had to be salted with salt, so every one of you shall be purified with divine grace." The idea is somewhat similar to the expression being "baptised with the Holy Ghost and with fire" (Matt. iii. 11).

<sup>1</sup> This opinion has been adopted by Calvin, Luther, and Lange.

The great lesson taught us is *the purifying nature of trial*. Trial is the fire of the great Refiner. Afflictions are sent with a most merciful purpose to the people of God, in order to purify them, to remove every thing that is sinful and impure and wrong, and to advance the work of grace within them—to call into exercise and to strengthen the graces of their Christian character. God chastens us that we may be made partakers of His holiness, and our light afflictions work out for us a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory. Believers are made perfect through suffering, and it is only through tribulation that they can enter into the kingdom of heaven. The precious metal must be cast into the furnace so that all the earthly dross that cleaves to it may be burned up, and must be polished and purified, until the great Refiner Himself sees His own image reflected in it. The infinite purity of God is a consuming fire which burns up all that is unholy and impure. And thus it happens that the most tried Christian is generally the most advanced Christian, the most conformed to the moral likeness of God. The more the believer is tried, the more he exercises a strict guard over his conduct, and the more he practises self-denial, the purer does his character become. "He is preserved from corruption, and consequently from everlasting destruction, by the fire of unsparing self-sacrifice."

But we must remember that affliction may be deprived of its efficacy, and even the very grace of God may be so perverted as to be rendered useless.

“Every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good ; but if the salt have lost his saltness wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves.” We must preserve the fruits of the Spirit in all their freshness and vigour. This can only be done by careful watchfulness, strict attention to our heart and conduct, earnest prayer, and the exercises of self-denial. By neglect or carelessness, by relaxing our endeavours, religion will grow cold and languid ; we will decline in the divine life, and lose our impressions of sacred things. And so it is with all the best things which God has bestowed on us ; by our negligence the salt may lose its saltness. Thus, even the glorious Gospel of the grace of God itself may be preached in such a cold manner, or so mutilated and distorted, as not only to lose its entire efficacy, but to become the savour of death unto death. The conduct of believers in the world may be so inconsistent and imperfect, or so devoid of living earnestness, as to influence their fellow-men for evil rather than for good—as to promote lukewarmness rather than excite to a living and healthy piety. And affliction, the design of which is to purify and soften, may have a directly opposite effect, that of hardening and increasing our insensibility. If the salt has lost its savour—if the grace of God be perverted and abused—there is nothing to restore that savour ; nothing wherewith the salt can again be salted.

## EXPOSITION IV.

### THE WOMEN AT THE CROSS.

JOHN xix. 25.

*Textus receptus.*—Εἰστήκεισαν δὲ παρὰ τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἡ ἀδελφὴ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, Μαρία ἡ τοῦ Κλωπᾶ, καὶ Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ.

*Authorised Version.*—Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary, the *wife* of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.

*Revised Version.*—But there were standing by the cross of Jesus, His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary, *the wife* of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

THE evangelist Luke informs us that our blessed Lord, during His public ministry, was accompanied by female disciples. Pious women belonging to Galilee became attached to His ministry and His person. They followed Him when He preached the Gospel in the cities and villages of the district. The names of these women are recorded to their eternal honour; and their devotedness to the Lord is held in perpetual remembrance. "And it came to pass afterward," writes St. Luke, "that He went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the

glad tidings of the kingdom of God ; and the twelve were with Him, and certain women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto Him of their substance" (Luke viii. 1-3). To these have to be added Mary, the wife of Cleophas, mentioned in our passage, and Salome, the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Matt. .xxxvii. 55, 56 ; Mark xv. 40, 41). They, at least those mentioned by St. Luke, were probably women in affluent circumstances, and high social positions ; one of them, we are informed, was the wife of a nobleman high in office in the court of Herod, the tetrach of Galilee.

The women who ministered to our Lord's wants in Galilee, accompanied Him on His last journey to Jerusalem. They followed Him to the cross. When all His male disciples forsook Him, they continued firm in their attachment to the close. They were doubtless among that great company of people and of women who followed bewailing and lamenting Him, and whom our Lord addressed on His way to Calvary (Luke xxiii. 27). They were present at the crucifixion ; "they stood by the cross of Jesus." At first, during the preparations for that awful tragedy, they would be constrained to stand afar off (Luke xxiii. 49) ; the Roman soldiers would prevent them approaching ; but afterwards they would gradually draw near, lamenting the cruel fate of Him whom they

regarded as their Lord and Master, the Saviour who had come to redeem Israel.

Nor were these women absent from the sepulchre. They came before all the disciples with their spices and ointments. Before the day began to dawn, while it was yet dark, they might be seen approaching the tomb. Nothing could detach them from their Master; even death itself could not sever the cords of their affection. As they followed Him when living, so they came to anoint His body when dead; for they were the same women who ministered to His wants in Galilee, who were present at the cross and the sepulchre.

I. The first of these pious women, mentioned as standing by the cross of Jesus is His mother, the Blessed Virgin: *ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ*. This circumstance is only mentioned by St. John; St. Matthew and St. Mark mention the other women by name, but they are silent as to the presence of the Virgin. Probably she stood apart from the rest, not belonging to the group, attended by the beloved disciple. It is probable also that she was not present at the time alluded to by the other evangelists, as she would have been early withdrawn by St. John from so terrible a sight. Mary was present at the crucifixion; but who will attempt to describe her agony of soul? The ancient painters represent her as veiled at the cross, as hers was a sorrow too sacred and too awful to look upon. She saw her Son, that Son who had been promised by an angel, and miraculously born; that Son whom she had brought up, and who had



remained with her for thirty years ; that Son who had performed such wonderful and beneficent works, cured the diseased, cleansed the lepers, and raised the dead ; that Son whom she loved as a mother and adored as her Saviour ; that Son who had collected around Him all the best spirits of the nation, and whom a few days before Israel seemed ready to acknowledge as their king, fallen a prey to His enemies, nailed to the cross, and dying a malefactor's death. Then would the words of old Simeon be recalled, for they now received their fulfilment, "Yea a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also." Jesus comforts the sorrowful woman ; in the midst of His cruel agony He addresses her from the cross, and commends her to the care of His dearest friend (John xix. 26, 27).

We may, perhaps, in the course of this exposition find a natural reason why Jesus intrusted John with the care of His mother, but spiritual reasons are obvious enough. "It presupposes," as Meyer observes, "the certainty in His mind that generally to *no other* hand could this dear legacy be so well intrusted." And what a blessed provision was thus made for both ! The two dearest friends of Jesus, the two who entered most deeply into His heart of hearts, were now associated in spiritual relationship, could now communicate their holy thoughts to each other, converse about Him whom they so ardently loved and adored ; and just because at the cross they suffered the most deeply, so they could enter

the more keenly into each other's feelings. This, with the exception of a casual allusion in the Acts (i. 14), is the last mention which we have in Scripture of the blessed Virgin. We are not informed whether our Lord manifested Himself to her after His resurrection, or whether she was present at the ascension. Had the gospels been mere fictitious narratives, written for the sake of sensation, such circumstances would have been detailed at length; their silence on these points is a proof of genuineness. According to one tradition, John would not leave Jerusalem until after the death of Mary; according to another, she accompanied the apostle to Ephesus, where she died in extreme old age. By some it was believed that she was buried at Gethsemane, and by others at Ephesus.

II. The second woman mentioned is the sister of the Virgin: ἡ ἀδελφὴ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ. It is generally supposed that only three women are mentioned as standing by the cross—the Virgin, her sister, and Mary Magdalene; and that the sister of our Lord's mother is further designated as "Mary, the wife of Cleophas." This, however, has lately been called in question. It is affirmed that four women are here mentioned, named in pairs; the first pair being our Lord's mother and her sister, whose name, for a reason afterwards to be assigned, is not here stated, and the second pair being the two Marys—Mary, the wife of Cleophas and Mary Magdalene. On this supposition the sister of our Lord's mother and

Mary, the wife of Cleophas, are to be regarded as different persons. The following are the reasons for this opinion:—I. It avoids the difficulty of supposing that our Lord's mother and her sister had the same name, both being called Mary. Such a coincidence may sometimes occur. Instances have been given of families where two sisters have the same names. Thus it is stated that Maria, Maria-Pia, and Maria-Immaculata, were the names of the three sisters of a Neapolitan king; and the writer of this exposition was acquainted with a family where two sisters were called Maria and Mary. But such a coincidence of names is rare, and consequently improbable. To escape this objection, some suppose that the word ἀδελφή is not to be taken in a strict sense, but in a laxer acceptation. Hengstenberg supposes that Mary, the wife of Cleophas, was not the actual sister but the sister-in-law of the Virgin, whilst Bishop Wordsworth supposes that she was her cousin. This, however, imposes an unusual meaning on ἀδελφή, for which no reason is assigned. Others affirm that there is an actual difference in the names, the Virgin Mary being called in Scripture *Μαριὰμ*, and her sister *Μαρία*. And certainly it is a singular fact that when the name of the Virgin is in the nominative or accusative it is *Μαριὰμ*, though when in the genitive it is *Μαρίας*, as if from *Μαρία*; whereas all the other Marys of the Gospel history are written *Μαρία*, so that the difference can hardly be explained by affirming that *Μαριὰμ* is the Hebrew,

and *Μαρία* the Greek form.<sup>1</sup> Still, however, both are forms of the Hebrew name Miriam. 2. On the supposition that four women are here meant, the number stated in St. John's gospel agrees with that given in the gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark. When we turn to these gospels, we find three women mentioned, the mother of our Lord being omitted. St. Matthew writes: "Many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto Him: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children" (Matt. xxvii. 55, 56). And the statement in St. Mark's gospel is precisely similar: "There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and Joses, and Salome" (Mark xv. 40). And the same three women are mentioned as at the sepulchre (Mark xvi. 1). All critics agree that Salome, mentioned by St. Mark, is the same as the mother of Zebedee's children, mentioned by St. Matthew. Now, St. John must have known that his own mother, Salome, was present at the crucifixion, and it is improbable that he would have omitted all allusion to her when mentioning the women who stood at the cross. Hence, it is reasonably inferred that Salome, the mother of Zebedee's children, mentioned by St. Matthew and St. Mark, was the sister of Mary

<sup>1</sup> See article Mary of Cleophas by the Rev. Frederick Meyrick in Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*.

the mother of Jesus, mentioned by St. John. 3. If Salome be the sister of the Virgin, then the silence of John with regard to her name is accounted for, as it is entirely in accordance with his manner. It is the same reserve of style by which he never mentions himself by name, but only by circumlocution, as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and never mentions his brother James, and only once his father Zebedee (John xxi. 2). 4. The received text admits of being read as if four women were mentioned. The mention of their names in pairs is similar to the manner in which the names of the apostles are enumerated. The Syriac, Ethiopian, and Persian versions insert a copula after *Μαρία*, and they interpret the passage as if four women were meant. So also Tischendorf (in Ed. vii. but not in Ed. viii.) in his punctuation apparently adopts the same interpretation, as he omits the comma after *Κλωπᾶ*.<sup>1</sup>

Salome is not conspicuously alluded to in the gospels. She is distinguished as the mother of James and John, who, along with Peter, were the three favourite apostles of our Lord. On one occasion she

<sup>1</sup> The opinion that two women are here mentioned, namely, Salome, the mother of James and John, the sister of the Virgin, and Mary the wife of Cleophas, the mother of James the less and Jesus, is adopted by Lange, Wieseler, Lücke, Ewald, and Meyer; and among English critics by Alford, Farrar, Bishop Lightfoot, Geikie, and Westcott. On the other hand, the opinion which identifies the Virgin's sister with Mary the wife of Cleophas is maintained by Calvin, Olshausen, Winer, Luthardt, Ebrard, Hengstenberg, and Brückner, and among English divines by Meyrick in his article on Mary of Cleophas in Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*.

came forward with the ambitious request to the Lord that her two sons might sit, the one on the right hand, and the other on the left, in His kingdom (Matt. xx. 20, 21). Such a request is not to be too harshly judged, for it was that of a mother interceding for her sons. She was present at the crucifixion, and was one of those women who came early to the sepulchre, and were the first to announce to the disciples the glad tidings of the resurrection (Mark xvi. 1, 6-8). According to Epiphanius, she was the daughter of Joseph, the husband of the Virgin, by a previous marriage.

III. The third woman mentioned is Mary the wife of Cleophas, *Μαρία ἡ τοῦ Κλωπᾶ*. The words *τοῦ Κλωπᾶ* are in the genitive of relationship, so that literally translated, they are "Mary of Cleophas," the particular relationship being left undetermined. Accordingly, some (Calvin) suppose that she was the daughter, and others (Ewald) that she was the mother of Cleophas. The relationship, stated in our version, is, however, most probably correct. She is called by St. Matthew and St. Mark the "mother of James and Joses." Joses is not elsewhere mentioned; but, on the supposition, which we shall find probable, that Cleophas is the same name as Alphæus, James was one of the twelve apostles. She was doubtless "the other Mary" (*ἡ ἄλλη Μαρία*, Matt. xxvii. 61; xxviii. 1), who is mentioned as accompanying Mary Magdalene to the sepulchre; for we cannot think that this title designates the Virgin; and Mary the wife of Cleophas is the only other Mary who has been mentioned.

Wieseler strangely supposes that by “the other Mary” is meant the wife or daughter of Joseph of Arimathea, because in the Alexandrian manuscript the reading of Mark xv. 47 is *Μαρία ἡ Ἰωσήφ*, a reading which is wanting in authority.

In the Authorised Version, this Mary is called “the wife of Cleophas; more correctly rendered it is “the wife of Clopas.” Why *Κλωπᾶ* should be rendered Cleophas cannot be determined, as there is no difference in the MSS.; perhaps it is in conformity with the Vulgate, which has *Maria Cleophæ*. The name is not to be identified with Cleopas, *Κλεόπας*, which St. Luke mentions as the name of one of the disciples going to Emmaus, to whom our Lord appeared after His resurrection (Luke xxiv. 18). *Κλεόπας* is probably a contraction for *Κλεόπατρος*, just as *Αντίπας* is a contraction for *Αντίπατρος*. On the other hand, there is reason to suppose that Clopas is the same as Alphæus, however differently those names may sound to an English ear. They are only a twofold mode of translating into Greek letters the Hebrew word *חֵלְפִי*. The Hebrew letter *Cheth* is rendered in Greek generally by *X* or *κ*, but occasionally without the aspirate, so that the above Hebrew letters might be rendered in Greek characters, Clopi or Alphi, and thus with Greek terminations, Clopas or Alphæus. This identifies James the son of Mary and Clopas with James the apostle, the son of Alphæus.

The above discussion throws some light on the intricate question concerning the relationship of Jesus

to the persons called "the brothers of the Lord." The common opinion is that the Lord's brothers are the sons of Mary the wife of Clopas or Alphæus, who is also regarded as the sister of the Virgin; so that they are not actual brothers, but cousins-germain. The names of these brothers are given in St. Matthew's gospel, namely, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas (Matt. xiii. 55). Now it is asserted that these are the names of the sons of Mary and Clopas. Mary is called the mother of James and Joses; the apostle Judas is called the brother of James; and, according to tradition, Simon, the Bishop of Jerusalem, was the son of Clopas. To this it has been objected, that to suppose brothers to mean only cousins is to put a forced and unnatural meaning on the word; that a similarity of names, especially such common Jewish names, proves nothing; that it is doubtful if Judas and Simon were the sons of Mary; and that, according to the above opinion, two of our Lord's brethren were apostles, whereas St. John tells us that "His brethren did not believe in Him" (John vii. 4). But the whole hypothesis is destroyed if we adopt the opinion, which appears to us most probable, that Salome, and not Mary the wife of Clopas, was the sister of the Virgin. According to this, it would follow that the sons of Mary the wife of Clopas, were not related to Jesus, whereas James and John the sons of Zebedee and Salome were his full cousins.

The denial of the common opinion, that the brothers of our Lord were only His full cousins, has an im-



portant bearing upon our Lord's recommendation of His mother to John. If, according to the opinion first advanced by Helvidius, and now adopted by many eminent critics, that they were the actual sons of Mary and Joseph born after Jesus, then it is somewhat difficult to account for His recommendation. If, it is argued, Mary had children of her own, and one of them afterwards such an eminent pillar of the Church as James, the Lord's brother, Jesus would not have broken these domestic ties, and recommended her to the care of John. To this it is replied, that John was in affluent circumstances, and had, perhaps, a house of his own in Jerusalem, which the brothers of our Lord certainly had not. But if, on the other hand, we adopt the favourite opinion of the Fathers, recently defended by Bishop Lightfoot in his commentary on the Galatians, and acquiesced in by Professor Westcott, that these brothers of our Lord were the children of Joseph by a former marriage, then His recommendation of Mary to John is easily explained ; for these brethren of the Lord were not connected to Mary by any tie of blood, whereas John was her nephew, being the son of her sister Salome.

IV. The fourth of those pious women is Mary Magdalene, *Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνή*. Next to the Virgin she is the most honoured, standing most prominently out in the gospel history. Of her, as well as of the Virgin, it may be said : " Hail thou that art highly favoured ; blessed art thou among

women." She, of all the disciples, was chosen to be the first to see the Lord after He had risen, and to announce that joyful fact to the brethren (Mark xvi. 9), an honour the highest that could be conferred. It would be a loss of time even to mention the many fanciful explanations which have been given of the appellation ἡ Μαγδαληνή. Certainly the most natural, and that which is now generally assented to, is that it denotes the place of her abode,—“Mary of Magdala.” Magdala or Migdol is the name of a town on the Sea of Galilee, and the statement that Mary was among the women who accompanied Jesus on His missionary journeys in Galilee coincides with this opinion.

Mary of Magdala has, by the Romanists, been identified with Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus. This identification is founded on the accounts which we have of the anointings of Jesus. Three anointings are mentioned in the gospels: the first was in the middle of our Lord's ministry, in the house of Simon the Pharisee, when a woman in the city, who was a sinner, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and washed His feet with her tears, and anointed them with the ointment (Luke vii. 37, 38): the second was toward the close of His ministry, in the house of Simon the leper, when a woman, having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, came and poured it upon His head, as He sat at meat (Matt. xxvi. 7; Mark xiv. 3), and the third was also at the close of His ministry in

Bethany, when Mary, the sister of Lazarus, took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair (John xii. 3).

Now, it has been supposed that these three anointings were performed by the same person, either on one occasion, being accounts of the same transaction, or on different occasions, and that this person was, as St. John informs us, Mary the sister of Lazarus, identifying her with Mary Magdalene, who is assumed to be the same as "the woman that is a sinner." That the two last anointings are the same is evident; both occurred a few days before the crucifixion, and at both the apostles found fault at the waste that was made. But the only point of resemblance between them and the first anointing is, that Simon was the name in both instances of the owner of the house in which this occurred—a coincidence which proves nothing, as Simon was, perhaps, the most common of Jewish names. In all other particulars the anointings are different. In the one case, the woman who anointed was "a woman in the city who was a sinner;" in the other case, it was the contemplative Mary who sat at Jesus' feet, and had chosen that good part which was never to be taken from her. The one anointing occurred in Galilee during the course of our Lord's ministry; the other in Bethany, at its close. Nor is there the slightest indication that Mary, the sister of Lazarus, and Mary Magdalene are the same. St. Luke, after mentioning Mary Magdalene as one of

the women who accompanied Jesus, refers to Mary, the sister of Lazarus, in such a manner as to intimate that she had not been named before : "It came to pass, as they went, that He entered into a certain village ; and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word" (Luke x. 38).

The identification of Mary of Bethany with Mary Magdalene is now relinquished by all except the Roman Catholics ; but it is still the common opinion that Mary Magdalene is the same as the woman who was a sinner, who washed the Lord's feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and concerning whom our Lord said, "Her sins which are many are forgiven her." So prevalent is this opinion that hospitals, erected for the recovery of fallen women, are called Magdalene asylums. But there is not one syllable in the gospel narrative in support of such a supposition. It seems to have arisen from the fact that the first mention of Mary Magdalene follows the account of the anointing of our Lord by the woman who was a sinner, and from the inference that Mary was a sinful woman drawn from the assertion that our Lord cast out of her seven devils. As to the first reason, it applied as strongly to Joanna the wife of Chuza, and Susanna ; and the second is equally baseless. Demoniacal possession was no evidence of peculiar depravity, but a species of insanity which, for all that we know, may still be a

form of mental disease among us. In all probability Mary Magdalene was a woman of high social position, afflicted with insanity, whom our Lord had cured, and who devoted herself to Him with all the warmth of a grateful heart. She was one of these devout and honourable women who accompanied our Lord, when He preached the Gospel in the villages of Galilee. As Dean Plumptre remarks: "Never, perhaps, has a figment so utterly baseless obtained so wide an acceptance as that which we connect with the name of the 'penitent Magdalene.'"

It is strange to find such a man as Archdeacon Farrar, in his *Life of Christ*, giving countenance to this baseless opinion. "An ancient tradition," he observes, "especially prevalent in the Western Church, and followed by the translators of our English version, — a tradition which though it must remain ever uncertain, is not in itself improbable, and cannot be disproved, — identifies this woman with Mary of Magdala, 'out of whom Jesus cast seven devils.' This exorcism is not elsewhere alluded to, and it would be perfectly in accordance with the genius of Hebrew phraseology if the expression had been applied to her, in consequence of a passionate nature and an abandoned life." Such a tradition may, indeed, give effect to biography, as it has done to painting and art; but to allude to it as a matter of history, utterly destitute as it is of proof, and, notwithstanding what is affirmed, in itself wholly improbable, is at least fanciful and hardly permissible.

But, after all, the tradition is not very ancient. There is not the slightest reference to it in the writings of the Fathers during the first three centuries. It is first mentioned hesitatingly by Ambrose and Jerome, but not until the sixth century is it directly maintained by Pope Gregory the Great. Through his influence and authority it was recognised by the Latin Church, but it was at no time adopted by the Greek Church. But doubtless what has given it its wide-spread acceptance in Western Europe are those matchless paintings of the penitent Magdalene by Raphael, Correggio, Battoni, Rotari, and other great artists, by which the error has become enshrined in art. It is to be regretted that the English translators of the Bible have given countenance to it, and as it were, stamped it by their authority, by heading the account of the anointing of the sinful woman, "Mary Magdalene anointeth Christ's feet."<sup>1</sup>

In the gospel history Mary Magdalene is mentioned for the first time in the company of these holy women who followed Jesus. It is said that the Lord had cast out of her seven devils (Luke viii. 2 ; Mark xvi. 9), implying that He had cured her of demoniacal possession of an aggravated form. Filled with gratitude to her Deliverer, she attached herself to His person. She accompanied Him on His last journey

<sup>1</sup> The identity of Mary Magdalene with the sinful woman is with few exceptions rejected by Biblical scholars and critics, by Calvin, Grotius, Bengel, Winer, Olshausen, De Wette, Meyer, Stier, Alford, Wordsworth, Ellicott, and Plumptre.

to Jerusalem, continued steadfastly with Him in His sufferings, stood at His cross, and was present during the closing hours of His agony. When Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus took down the body, she watched where they laid the remains of her much-honoured Lord and Master. With the other women she prepared the sweet spices for the anointing, and after the sacred rest of the Sabbath was past, she hurried with them to the sepulchre. To their surprise they behold the stone rolled away, and the sepulchre empty. Mary runs to give information to the disciples, but she does not remain long away. She returns with Peter and John ; they, having satisfied themselves, depart ; but she remains without the sepulchre weeping ; the intensity of her affection keeps her fixed to the spot ; she leaves not her Master dying or dead ; and then it was that to her first of all the disciples the risen Lord manifested Himself in His resurrection body, and announced the joyful intelligence that the bonds of death were burst asunder by Him. Mary was the herald of the great victory of our Lord over death and the grave, of the accomplishment of salvation, of the final defeat of Satan and all the powers of darkness. It was not to John the beloved disciple, nor to Peter the sorrowing penitent, though both were at the sepulchre, but to Mary Magdalene, that our Lord first appeared ; she was the elect messenger of God ; she was the first to raise the cry of victory, "He is risen," which has since been taken up by countless millions of the human race,

and will continue to be repeated until the end of time.

Tradition has added to this Scriptural account of Mary Magdalene, but it has taken a twofold form—that of the Latin and that of the Greek Church. The Latin Church, which identifies Mary Magdalene with the sister of Lazarus, relates that she in company with her brother Lazarus, her sister Martha, a servant Marcella, and Maximus, one of the seventy disciples, came in a wonderful manner to Gaul. The Jews put them in a ship without oars that they might perish by sea, and the ship landed at Marseilles. Mary remained in a cave near Arles, and lived a life of penitence for thirty years. Clovis, the king of the Franks, was converted at her intercession, and she is specially worshipped in France as one of its patron saints. The tradition of the Greek Church is entirely different; there is in it no trace of the penitent Magdalene. According to it Mary Magdalene was the daughter of the Syrophenician woman whom our Lord cured of demoniacal possession; she proceeded to Rome for the purpose of accusing Pilate before the imperial court of the murder of Jesus; afterwards she came to Ephesus and resided with the Virgin and St. John; there she died and was buried. According to the biography of St. Willebald, that saint saw her grave at Ephesus in the year 745. About the year 886 the Emperor Leo VI. brought her bones to Constantinople. Next to the blessed Virgin, Mary Magdalene of all Christian women is the most



honoured, both in the Sacred Scriptures and in the traditions of the Church ; hymns have been written in her praise, the painter and the sculptor have perpetuated her fame, and churches innumerable have been erected to her memory.

## EXPOSITION V.

### THE GROANING CREATION.

ROMANS viii. 19-23.

*Textus receptus.*—Ἡ γὰρ ἀποκαταδοκία τῆς κτίσεως τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀπεκδέχεται. Τῇ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἡ κτίσις ὑπετάγη, οὐχ ἐκούσα, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα, ἐπ' ἐλπίδι, ὅτι καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ κτίσις ἐλευθερωθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης τῶν τέκνων τοῦ Θεοῦ. Οἴδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις στεναάζει καὶ συνωδίνει ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν· οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ Πνεύματος ἔχοντες, καὶ ἡμεῖς αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στεναάζομεν, υἰοθεσίαι ἀπεκδεχόμενοι τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν.

*Authorised Version.*—For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *the same* in hope; because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body.

*Revised Version.*—For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of

him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only so, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for *our* adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body.

ONE important rule in ascertaining the meaning of any difficult or disputed passage of Scripture is to consider it not by itself, as isolated and detached, but in strict connection with the context. This may not entirely remove the difficulty, but will often prevent the adoption of a false meaning, and suggest the direction in which the true meaning is to be found. The apostle, in the previous part of this chapter, has been discoursing on the privileges of believers, and in the verses immediately preceding he mentions the high dignity of sonship. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." He states, as if incidentally, that, as in the case of the Lord Himself, the glory which awaits believers will be preceded by suffering: "If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together." Suffering and glory were conjoined in the case of the Master, and will also be conjoined in the case of the disciple; first the cross, then the crown; first the battle, then the victory; first the toil and heat of the day, then the rest. But the glory will be so transcendently great that the sufferings will be completely forgotten; or rather, we

will bless God for them, as being the prelude to the glory. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." And then follows the passage selected for exposition, in which the apostle assigns as a reason for the certainty and transcendent greatness of the glory of believers, that it is expected and will be shared in by all creation: "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." The same idea of suffering first and glory afterwards is extended to all creation: first the bondage of corruption, and afterwards the glorious liberty of the children of God. "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

There are no variations of any importance in the readings of the text; but the translation in our Authorised Version requires emendation. It is to be observed that in these verses there is mention both of the creature (verses 19, 20, 21) and of the creation (verse 22); but in the original the words are expressed by the same term *κτίσις*. It is confusing, and leads to error to give the word two meanings. It ought throughout to be rendered either creation or creature. In verse 20, the words "not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected" (*οὐχ ἐκούσα, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα*) are to be taken as a parenthesis, and consequently the words "in hope" (*ἐπ' ἐλπίδι*) are to be applied, not to the sub-

jector (τὸν υποτάξαντα), but to the state of subjection (ὑπετάγη); "For the creature was made subject to vanity . . . in hope." Verse 21 has been differently rendered, but it is best to consider it with Meyer as specifying the object of the hope of creation; and hence ὅτι is not to be translated *because*, but *that*. Τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης is not to be translated "the glorious liberty," as if it were a Hebraism, but "the liberty of the glory": τῆς δόξης is the genitive of apposition; that liberty which consists in the glory of the children of God.

The chief difficulty relates to the meaning to be attached to κτίσις. Its special meaning is to be ascertained from the context. There are four different senses in which it is used in the New Testament. Sometimes it denotes the sum-total of what God has created — *the creation*. "From the beginning of the creation, God made them, male and female" (Mark x. 6; so also Mark xiii. 19; Rom. i. 20; 2 Pet. iii. 4). Sometimes it is used to denote what is created—*the creature*; so it is thrice rendered in the passage under consideration, and this is its evident meaning in the last verse of this chapter: "Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. viii. 39; so also Rom. i. 25). Sometimes it is used for mankind in general; as in the command to preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark xvi. 15; so also Col. i. 23). And sometimes it is limited to *believers*, as when the apostle says: "If

any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor. v. 17; so also Gal. vi. 15). In the two last senses, *κτίσις* is limited by the context. In our passage we prefer the meaning *creation* as the most usual meaning of the word, both in the Septuagint and in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup>

There are different opinions as to the *extent* of the creation (*κτίσις*) in our passage. The most opposite meanings have been assigned to the term. The Reformers generally limited it to the inanimate creation; this was the opinion of Luther and Beza. St. Augustine limits it to the unbelieving portion of the human race, and in this he is followed by Doddridge, Whitby, Macknight, and many modern commentators. Some restrict it to the unbelieving Jews, and others to the unbelieving Gentiles. Others have explained it of believers as the new creation, though this would seem in contradiction to verse 23. The greater number of modern exegetes refer it to the lower creation, as distinguished from mankind. Others, and notably Olshausen, take it in its most unlimited sense as denoting all created things generally, the animate and inanimate nature, including mankind. Jowett strangely supposes that its meaning is not to be taken in each of the four verses in which it is used in precisely the same sense. "It may," he observes, "refer to the creature considered from within, in which sense it is a personified *σάρξ*, which is the best explanation of it in verse 19; or to the creature considered from

<sup>1</sup> So also Revised Version.

without, as the figure of a former dispensation, which is the sense to which it inclines in verses 20, 21 ; or to the creation collectively, of which man is, nevertheless, the principal part, as in verse 22. That even this last is not to be pressed too strictly we shall see in considering verse 23, the form of which seems to exclude the believer from the circle of creation."

The term is plainly limited by the context. The holy angels are excluded, because it cannot be said of them that they are subject to vanity. It is also manifest that believers in Christ are excluded, because they are directly contrasted with the creation ; for, after stating that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now," the apostle adds, "not only so, but ourselves also," belonging to a different category, "which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body."

So far, such limitations of the term are evident and generally admitted ; but it is a much more difficult inquiry, Whether those who are not believers are also excluded ? Does *ἡ κτίσις* here refer to the human race at all ? This is a point which has been much controverted ; reasons have been assigned both for and against the exclusion of unbelievers. On the one hand, it has been maintained that there are intimations in the passage which show that *κτίσις* does not include unbelievers. For example, it is affirmed that "the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly,"

an assertion which can hardly agree with the fall of man, and with the free and deliberate sinful acts of the human race. We are informed that the restoration of the creation to liberty will take place at the revelation of the sons of God; whereas unbelievers can only be restored on the condition of their conversion, or on their actually becoming the sons of God. If unbelievers are meant, we would have expected that sin would have been more prominently mentioned as the cause of their subjection to vanity, and faith in Christ alluded to as the condition of their deliverance from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. Besides, when *κτίσις* denotes the human race, mankind without exception is meant; whereas, when the unbelieving portion of the human race is meant, the term *κόσμος* is always used in the New Testament. But, on the other hand, strong reasons have been assigned against the exclusion of unbelievers. It may well be affirmed that mankind was subject to vanity, not willingly, because their coming into the world in a depraved state was involuntary, being a consequence of the sin of Adam. The word *κτίσις* is never employed in the New Testament to signify animate and inanimate creation with the exclusion of the human race, and that believers are not here included appears from the context. Besides, the apostle does not mean by *κτίσις* the unbelieving portion of the human race exclusively, but in connection with the lower creation; so that the term *κόσμος*, which is restricted to the unbelieving



world, would be here inappropriate. And to restrict the term to the lower creation would give a very narrow and feeble meaning to the passage.

Nevertheless, the meaning that is adopted by the greater number of our modern exegetes, is that not only believers, but also unbelievers are excluded from the creation here adverted to; that, in the words of Dean Alford, "The right explanation is, all animate and inanimate nature as distinguished from mankind."<sup>1</sup> According to this view, the *κτίσις* is to be restricted to the lower creation, just in the same manner as we use the popular term "all nature," from which we are accustomed to exclude intelligent beings. So also we speak of "natural history," meaning thereby the description of the lower animals, and the "animal creation," excluding from this phrase the human race. According to this view, the apostle alludes to the involuntary subjection of the inferior creation to vanity, and to a deliverance from this subjection and a restoration to liberty at the revelation of the sons of God, when Christ's kingdom shall be universally established, when all things shall be put in subjection under His feet, and when evil shall be finally subdued or abolished throughout the universe.

The apostle asserts that "the creature was subject to vanity," *τῇ ματαιότητι ἣ κτίσις ὑπετάγη.* The word

<sup>1</sup> This is the view adopted by Grotius, Reiche, De Wette, Neander, Ewald, Tholuck, Meyer, Philippi, and all our best modern critics. Olshausen is almost the only critic of note who adopts the opposite opinion.

*καταιότης* denotes emptiness, instability, decay, what is called in the next verse corruption (*φθορᾶς*). To be subject to vanity is to be under its dominion, to be enslaved by it, an expression equivalent to "the bondage of corruption." The apostle evidently presupposes a period when the creature was not thus enthralled. The allusion, in all probability, is to the change which came over creation at the Fall; when a curse was pronounced not only upon man, but upon the ground, and, as some suppose, upon the inferior creation for man's sake (Gen. iii. 17, 18). By the Fall the human race undoubtedly became subject to vanity; and the same is also the case when we restrict the term *κτίσις* to the inferior creation. We are not, indeed, in a position to tell what change came over the face of the earth, and over the nature and happiness of the lower animals as a direct consequence of the fall of man, whether and how far they have deteriorated from a more exalted pristine condition; but most certain it is that sin has involved the lower creation in numerous calamities. Man's cruelty has brought a vast amount of suffering and misery on the inferior animals. The burdens which are laid upon them often far beyond their strength, the cruel sports in which men indulge, deriving happiness from what occasions suffering to the brute creation, those disclosures in the practice of vivisection which have lately been made, often wantonly torturing living animals beyond what is necessary for the advancement of medical research, the unfeeling insensibility to their

wants, the barbarities practised upon them, occasion those groans and that travail of creation about which the apostle speaks, and which rise up to heaven, calling aloud for vengeance.

Whatever, as naturalists, we may think of the nature of the lower animals, and however readily we admit that many of them were created with fierce and ravenous dispositions, and that the Fall effected no change in their anatomical structure, yet it is certain that the sin of man is the cause of much of their misery. Indeed, the more we reflect upon it, the more we shall be constrained to arrive at the opinion that sin is the great cause of disturbance in the universe of God; that all real evils are directly or indirectly occasioned by it, and that by it the creation was made subject to vanity, and labours under the bondage of corruption. Banish sin from this world, and you banish misery, and strife, and unhappiness, and cruelty, and wrong; you bring in the golden era of purity, and peace, and happiness; you restore the bliss of Paradise. Banish sin from this world, and, for all that we know, many of those agencies which we now look upon as the laws of nature, but which are in reality disturbances in nature, as, for example, those laws which occasion and regulate the famine and the pestilence, may be modified or cease. Banish sin from this world, and you banish along with it disease, and pain, and death; you deliver the creation from the bondage of corruption, and exalt it to the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

The apostle tells us that this subjection of creation to vanity was involuntary: οὐχ ἐκούσα. We have seen how, in a certain sense, this is true even of the intelligent creation, although morally accountable and possessed of freedom of will. They fell into a state of moral corruption, not willingly, but in consequence of the sin of Adam. But whatever modification of meaning these words must have when applied to the human race, they are true in their most direct sense when applied to the lower animals. The irrational creation was made subject to vanity by no fault of their own; they are not morally accountable creatures; they have no sense of God, nor of their obligation to Him, and therefore cannot be guilty of sin properly so called.

Their subjection, the apostle further tells us, was on account of him who subjected (διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα). Negatively the subjection was not occasioned by themselves, and positively it was by reason of the subjector. There are various opinions concerning the person who is here meant. St. Chrysostom supposes that it was Adam, and that what the apostle here teaches us is, that his transgressions brought creation into so deplorable a condition.<sup>1</sup> Others suppose that the subjector is the devil, because it was through his temptation that our first parents sinned and fell. But although it was in consequence of the guilt of Adam that the subjection arose, and although Satan was the active agent in that guilt, yet the absence of

<sup>1</sup> So also Doddridge and Macknight.

any defining statement constrains us to refer the subjection to God. This subjection to vanity was no unforeseen event, but was in conformity with His will and counsel. For wise reasons, though to us inexplicable, God subjected the creation to vanity. The subject is connected with the deepest mysteries of God's moral government, with the origin and permission of moral evil—a problem which has baffled the understanding of the wisest of the human race, and which may now justly be regarded as insolvable.

The apostle adds “in hope,” ἐπ’ ἐλπίδι, denoting that this state of subjection is not hopeless, irremediable, and eternal, but only temporary, and that it shall issue in deliverance and restoration to liberty. “In hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.” The creation then may indulge in the expectation of future deliverance; nor is there any inappropriateness in attributing to the irrational creation such feelings as expectancy and desire, for such personifications are common in Scripture, and, indeed, in all literature.

In confirmation of his assertion that the creation is subject to vanity, the apostle adds: “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” Οἶδαμεν, we know it. It is a fact which can neither be disputed nor denied. We have only to open our eyes to see the sufferings, and our ears to hear the groanings of creation; we have only to penetrate below the outside covering, and we

shall see that the world is not so happy as it sometimes appears to be. We may be insensible to its sufferings, we may carefully avoid the abodes of wretchedness, we may shut our eyes and stop our ears to the miseries and sighs of humanity ; but think on the vast multitudes laid on beds of sickness and racked with pain ; think on the painful diseases with which life is often terminated ; think on the squalor, and degradation, and wretchedness of vast masses in our crowded cities ; visit our infirmaries, our hospitals for the incurable, our asylums, our rooms for surgical operations ; penetrate into the dark abodes of misery and crime—the prisons, the dungeons, the torture chambers ; think on the atrocities perpetrated by slave-dealers and slave-holders ; think on the fields of battle and the places of execution ; think on the bloody revolutions and the reigns of terror ; think on the cruelties and barbarities which have been perpetrated on the defenceless inhabitants of invaded countries ; think on the cruel tyrants who have glutted themselves in the miseries of their victims ; think on the persecutions which have raged in almost every country, and on the foul atrocities of the inquisition, practised by a so-called Christian priesthood ; listen to the cries of oppressed humanity and outraged innocence ; and although it may be asserted that the word *creation* is here to be limited to the inferior animals, yet we cannot help thinking that the sufferings of mankind also entered into the thoughts of the apostle, when he penned these words—

sufferings which were abundantly visible and audible when he wrote this Epistle, when the Roman empire was ruled by one of the greatest monsters who ever disgraced humanity,—a very prodigy of wickedness—the Emperor Nero. Hardly any period in the past history of the world afforded a more complete verification of his words: “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”

The apostle proceeds to affirm that believers themselves are not excluded from these groans and this travail. “And not only so,”—not only is this the case with regard to the creation,—“but ourselves also,” we who are Christians as distinct from the creation—“who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves.” Believers are not delivered from the common calamities which befall the rest of the creation; they likewise are subject to sickness, pain, bereavement, death, and to all the outward miseries to which their fellow-men are exposed. And besides those general, they have special sufferings arising from what remains of indwelling sin, the infirmity of their best purposes, and a constant and painful feeling of dissatisfaction with their spiritual condition. These cause them to groan within themselves, and earnestly to long for deliverance, not only from the calamities of life, but from the presence and power of indwelling sin. As Philippi remarks, “With the perpetual Abba cry of the children of God is blended a perpetual *Kyrie eleison*.” At present they

have the first-fruits of the Spirit (τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ Πνεύματος); that is, not the highest gift of the Spirit, nor the first outpouring of the Spirit, but the earnest (ἀρραβῶν) of future or higher gifts—the first-fruits as the pledge of the approaching harvest. Those graces of faith, hope and love, which are now imparted to them, are the first-fruits of the spiritual harvest. And the imperfections of their present state, and the possession of these first-fruits, excite their longing for their perfect redemption; “waiting for the adoption,” the public manifestation of their sonship, namely “the redemption of their body,” the complete recovery both of soul and body from the fatal effects of the Fall, when they shall enjoy that full and perfect liberty of God’s children, of which, in the gift of the Spirit, they possessed the foretaste here below.

The truth taught us in this passage is, that there will be a period of renovation. The creation will not be always subject to vanity; it will be emancipated from the bondage of corruption. The golden age is not in the past, but in the future. There will yet dawn even upon this lower world a purer and happier era, when what is now in disorder will be rectified, and misery and evil will be modified, if not removed. Creation will be no longer ruled over by vanity as by some cruel master, and be under the bondage of corruption; but it will attain to the liberty of the glory of the children of God—that liberty which will occur at the manifestation of the sons of God. This renovation of the



world is alluded to in many parts of Scripture. The prophets foretold it in the sublimest language of Oriental poetry. "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah xi. 6-9). Nor is the New Testament silent about this renovation of the world. This is the "times of restitution of all things," about which St. Peter speaks in his address to the Jews (Acts iii. 21); and the "new heavens and new earth," to which he alludes in his second epistle (2 Pet. iii. 13), and of which mention is made by St. John in the Apocalypse (Rev. xxi. 1). All the evil effects of the Fall will be removed, and therefore whatever mischief it caused to creation will be done away with. Nay, it would seem that the disturbing influences of sin will be removed from this lower world; in the new heavens and the new earth dwelleth righteousness. It may be that purity and innocence will again take up their abode here below, and that the whole earth will be converted into Paradise. It may be that the world, purified from sin, will constitute

the abode of redeemed man. It may be that the Lord Jesus Christ in His human nature will reign here with His saints. These are points not revealed, and about which it is vain to conjecture. But one thing is revealed, that a glorious future is in store for the world ; that the poetical description of the prophets will at least in spirit be realised ; and that the creation which is now subject to vanity, under the bondage of corruption, continually groaning and travailing in pain, will attain to liberty, will be delivered from these evils, and purified from sin and defect. As Luther expresses it : " God will not only make the earth, but the heavens far fairer than they are now. The present world is in its working clothes, hereafter it will put on an Easter and Whitsunday suit."

This glorious consummation, we are informed, will take place at the revelation or manifestation of the sons of God. The period here alluded to is the final triumph of Christ and His people, when believers who are even now the sons of God will be openly manifested and declared to be so ; when their adoption will be consummated and publicly proclaimed to the whole universe ; when Christ will have obtained the complete victory over all His enemies, and when all things will be put in subjection under His feet ; and when, in the redemption of countless millions of the human race, He will see of the travail of His soul and will be satisfied. Then will the earnest expectations of creation, its longings for deliverance be

fulfilled. And so also, we are informed, believers themselves look forward to the same glorious issue, "waiting for the adoption,"—this manifestation of sonship, "even the redemption of our body." Then will all the fatal effects of the Fall be reversed; death will be abolished, and even our very bodies will be raised from the tomb. Then will commence a new era of eternity, the history of a redeemed and ransomed universe. Such is the final consummation of the present state of things; the sufferings of creation will terminate in glory, as was seen in the case of Christ and His disciples.

We conclude with a paraphrase of the whole passage: For the earnest expectation of the creation—its conscious and unconscious longings, is waiting for the revelation or manifestation of the sons of God, when Christ shall appear in glory, and openly acknowledge and reward His faithful servants. For the creation lost its original purity and happiness, and was made subject to vanity, became a prey to wretchedness, not of its own free will, but brought about by the counsel and will of God who subjected it. But this subjection to vanity is not final and irremediable, but a subjection in hope that the creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, set free from that condition of slavery and subjection to vanity, and brought into that liberty which consists in the glorified state of the children of God. For we know, it is a patent and acknowledged fact, that the whole creation ever since the Fall,

has groaned and travailed in pain together, and has been full of misery and suffering, until now, even to this present hour; and not only is this the case, but even we ourselves, who possess the first-fruits of the Spirit, and thus enjoy in some degree the deliverance and liberty of the sons of God, even we groan within ourselves, exposed as we are to all the calamities of life, and burdened with a heavy load of guilt and imperfection, waiting for our adoption, the public declaration of our sonship, which consists in the redemption of our body, our complete deliverance from all the evil effects of the Fall, death, the last enemy, being vanquished.

## EXPOSITION VI.

SAVED AS BY FIRE.

I CORINTHIANS iii. 15.

*Textus receptus.*—Εἴ τις τὸ ἔργον κατακαήσεται, ζημιωθήσεται· αὐτὸς δὲ σωθήσεται, οὕτως δὲ ὡς διὰ πυρός.

*Authorised Version.*—If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss : but he himself shall be saved ; yet so as by fire.

*Revised Version.*—If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss : but he himself shall be saved ; yet so as through fire.

THERE is no important variation in the readings of the manuscripts and versions in this verse, so that the words may well be considered as the genuine words of the apostle. The only difference in the rendering is, that whereas the Authorised Version translates διὰ πυρός "by fire," the Revised Version has "through fire," an alteration which is correct, and imparts to the verse a somewhat different meaning.

The difficulty in this verse consists in the interpretation ; in ascertaining the precise meaning attached to the words by the apostle. For the elucidation of this it is necessary that we should first consider the

context. The apostle compares believers, or the Church of Christ, to a building of God, "Ye are God's building." It is one building of which he speaks—viz., the Church of Christ in whatever part of the world established, and in whatever period of time it exists. He does not speak of many buildings or churches, as for example of the Church of Corinth, the Church of Rome, the Church of Jerusalem ; but of one building, the Church universal. Nor is the metaphor employed that of a city, but that of a house or temple. Of this building, he himself was privileged to lay the foundation when he first preached the Gospel at Corinth. "According to the grace of God which is given me, as a wise master-builder," as a skilful architect (*ἀρχιτέκτων*), "I have laid the foundation." He refers his doing so to "the grace of God which was given unto him : " it was not by reason of his own merits that he was so highly privileged, but it was owing to the unmerited gift of God ; nor was this grace peculiar to him in virtue of his apostolic office, as if it were the prerogative of the apostles to lay the foundation, but it was given to him in common with all Christian missionaries. And as St. Paul was privileged to lay the foundation, so others were employed to build up the structure : "and another buildeth thereon ;" not only Apollos, who succeeded the apostle in Corinth, but all other subsequent teachers. In doing so, they must exercise a wise caution, "But let every man take heed how," with what materials, "he buildeth thereupon."

It is of the superstructure that the apostle in this admonition speaks, not of the foundation itself. The one and only foundation on which the building stands, is Jesus Christ: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Christ Himself is the sure and well-tried foundation of this spiritual edifice; according as it is written, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation" (Isa. xxviii. 16). This foundation has been laid, once for all, by God Himself; He has given His Son to be the foundation of His Church. In one point of view, indeed, the apostle laid the foundation (*τέθεικα, θεῖναι*), when he first preached Christ—His death and resurrection—at Corinth. But in another and higher point of view the foundation was already laid (*κείμενον*) by God, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation." And it is Christ Himself who is this foundation laid by God; not any doctrine concerning Christ, not even the atonement; nor any fact in His history, not even His death or resurrection. Christianity, unlike all other religions, is founded on a Person; it is the religion of Christ, He is the great centre of our faith, so that if the living Christ were removed from it, His religion would have no existence. "The historical Person of Christ," observes De Wette, "is the one unchangeable element of Christianity: Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." In a word, Christianity is Christ.

But although the building is one and the foundation one, yet the builders are many, and the materials which they employ are different. Some build well and substantially, and others build ill and unsubstantially. Some, observes the apostle, pursuing the metaphor, build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious or costly stones—materials at once durable and valuable; and others build wood, hay, stubble—materials perishable and of little or no value. The builders here alluded to are the teachers of Christianity; and consequently the different materials employed are different kinds of teaching; on the one hand good and wholesome doctrine, and on the other hand that which is worthless. The apostle does not here speak of Christians who are building up their religious character, except by implication; and far less does he speak of worthy Christians as represented by the gold, the silver, and the costly stones, and unworthy Christians as represented by the wood, the hay, and the stubble.

All these materials will be tested. There is a day coming when the fire of trial or of judgment will test the materials which the different builders have built on the foundation. "Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it." This day is not the destruction of Jerusalem;<sup>1</sup> nor the mere lapse of time;<sup>2</sup> nor the clear light of the Gospel;<sup>3</sup> nor the day of tribulation;<sup>4</sup> but, as is often the case

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Burnett, Lightfoot, Whitby.

<sup>2</sup> Grotius.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine.



where the term *day* is used emphatically (Rom. xiii. 12; Heb. x. 25), the day of the Lord, the Parousia, the day of Christ's appearance, when by the light of His countenance all darkness will be dispelled. The apostle adds, "because it (the day) shall be revealed by fire," or rather is revealed (*ἀποκαλύπτεται*) by fire," announcing at once its futurity and certainty. Fire is the element in which Christ shall appear; "He shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire" (2 Thess. i. 8). And as the day will reveal the works, so the fire, by which that day shall be ushered in, will test them, "and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." Here, also, it is evident that the fire is not the fire of persecution which certainly did test the early converts to Christianity, and revealed the reality or the falsehood of their discipleship; but the fire of judgment, in which Christ shall appear, and by which all works will be tried. Then shall all the labours of the different teachers be tested; the doctrines which they taught shall be examined; that which is profitable will be rewarded, and that which is worthless will be consumed. The imperishable materials—the gold, the silver, and the precious stones—will stand the test, and the builder will receive his wages; the perishable materials—the wood, the hay, the stubble, will be burned up, and the builder will lose at once his hire and his labour. "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward; if any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss:

but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.”

Two things are presented to our consideration : the destruction of the work and the salvation of the worker.

I. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WORK.—At the great day of manifestation—the Parousia or coming of the Lord,—and by the fire of judgment, all perishable materials will be consumed ; whilst the gold, the silver, and the costly stones remain ; the wood, hay, and stubble will be burned up. The metaphor is that of a building tested by fire ; what is incombustible about it remains, what is combustible is destroyed. The city of Corinth itself, some years before this, was burned by the Romans ; all the meaner buildings—the wood houses, the thatched roofs were consumed by the conflagration ; whilst the substantial buildings—the stately temples, the marble pillars, the gold, the silver, and the brass remained among the ruins.<sup>1</sup> Or to take a more exact illustration. The temple of Jerusalem, that building erected to the glory of God, has been burned over and over again ; its roofs, cloisters, columns, porches, gates, have been consumed ; but several of its walls, composed of the most solid materials, carefully selected, and substantially built, have stood the test of centuries, and remain to this

<sup>1</sup> “It is possible,” observes Dean Stanley, “that this whole image, as addressed to the Corinthians, may have been suggested or illustrated by the conflagration of Corinth under Mummius ; the stately temples standing amidst the universal destruction of the meaner buildings.”

day the enduring monuments of its past greatness. So, in like manner, with Christ's spiritual temple; there are materials which are imperishable, and there are materials which are perishable. All that teaching which glorifies Christ and promotes the holiness of the human race is like the gold, the silver, and the costly stones; but all that teaching in which Christ is in a great measure overlooked, and which is overlaid by extraneous matter, which, whilst it may please the intellect, fails to purify the heart, will not stand the test of the great day of the Lord's appearance.

It is to be observed that anti-Christian doctrines,—doctrines which deny Christ and are opposed to His religion, are not here alluded to. All the builders are building on the true foundation; but some of the materials employed are perishable. The apostle primarily alludes to those Jewish accretions to the Gospel, which were common in his day; or, it may be, to those who preached Christ from improper motives, out of envy or strife. And, in our days, there are many perishable materials employed in building Christ's spiritual temple. Some add to the Gospel; as, for example, inculcate penances, mortification, the neglecting of the body; others diminish from it, and teach a latitudinarianism beyond the liberty which the Gospel allows. So, also, mistaken zeal often distorts the Gospel, and by its extravagant practices and irreverent expressions raises a prejudice against it in the minds of in-

telligent men, as if true religion were conjoined with a certain feebleness of intellect. Many teachers are heated by a controversial spirit, and seek rather to promote the interests of their sect than the cause of Jesus Christ. Some are narrow-minded, and restrict the covenant mercies of God within the limits of the small community to which they belong. Some introduce their own opinions into the Gospel, and mix up the human with the divine. All those may be building on the true foundation; but the materials with which they build are worthless—wood, hay, stubble, which will be burned up by the fire which will try every man's work.

The builder, who uses these perishable materials "shall suffer loss." And this loss is twofold. First, his works shall be destroyed. He shall lose all his labour, and toil, and efforts; he shall find that he has been "labouring in vain, and spending his strength for nought and in vain;" that the inculcation of bodily penances does not advance the spiritual interests of men, that narrow-mindedness and bigotry are destructive of charity, that latitudinarianism has produced a defective Gospel, that the extravagancies of mistaken zeal have not advanced the kingdom of Christ, and that preaching a sensational religion was not for the edifying of the Church. And, secondly, he shall lose the reward of his labours. Whilst they who have laboured faithfully and preached the pure Gospel will receive the reward of those who have turned many to righteousness; those whose ministry has

been a failure by defects in their teaching, mixture in their motives, or inconsistency in their conduct, will lose in a measure the reward of the faithful servant. At the same time, the fire of judgment will not be entirely consuming; it will be also purifying; it will consume the dross, but purify the gold; it will remove the bigotry and intolerance which adhered to many good and religious men when on earth, and will enable them to look on things, not with the jaundiced eye of prejudice, but in the light of God's truth. The very burning up of the works will be for the advantage of the worker; the loss sustained will in some measure be gain.

II. THE SALVATION OF THE WORKER.—“But he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.” This clause has given rise to a variety of opinions, but when we attend to the context, when we remember that the builder though he employs worthless materials is building on the true foundation, and that the fire is the fire of judgment in which Christ will appear, the words are not difficult of explanation.

I. There is the truly revolting interpretation of some of the early Fathers who think that “saved through fire” means *preserved for hell fire*.<sup>1</sup> The works are consumed, but the workers are saved, that is kept alive for ever in the fire of hell. The fire here is conceived to be the fire of Gehenna. Thus St. Chrysostom observes, “The false teacher shall not

<sup>1</sup> The same meaning which some of the Fathers give to that other text, “Salted by fire,” Mark ix. 49.

perish with his works ; but shall be preserved in the fire.”<sup>1</sup> But it is evident that such an interpretation is as erroneous as it is horrible. The fire here mentioned is not the fire of Gehenna, but the fire of judgment which will try every man’s works—the works of the righteous as well as of the wicked, and in which fire Christ Himself shall appear. And such a meaning given to *σωθήσεται*, preserved for eternal fire, is unexampled in Scripture ; indeed, gives to the word a meaning precisely the opposite of that designed. It is evident that it denotes saved from hell, admitted into heaven.

2. Another interpretation, advanced by certain Roman Catholic divines, is that the fire here mentioned is that of *purgatory*. This is one of those verses by which the Romish doctrine of purgatory has been frequently defended. Those who are saved are undoubtedly true believers ; they have built upon the true foundation ; but they are imperfect believers, and before they can be admitted into heaven they have to be purified ; they must pass through an ordeal of fire ; the dross must first be burned up ; hence they are saved through fire ; they suffer the pains of purgatory, designed for the purification of those who have not been completely purified, or whose sins have not been expiated in life. But although there is an appearance of support to this view in this verse, yet when closely examined in connection with the context, it will be seen that this appearance wholly

<sup>1</sup> So also Theophylact and Ecumenius.

vanishes. The fire is that which occurs at the day of judgment, whereas purgatory exists only during the intermediate state, and a termination is put to it by the judgment ; then every man's fate is finally and irrevocably decided ; not to mention that in this fire Christ Himself appears. Nor is the reference to the purification from personal sin ; the fire of judgment is one of trial and separation ; "not a purgatorial, but a probationary fire ;" and the materials which are tested by it are the doctrines of teachers, and not the characters of believers. So that as Bengel observes : "This text so far from fanning the flames of purgatory, acts as their extinguisher."<sup>1</sup>

3. The usual meaning adopted by critics is that "saved so as through fire" is a proverbial expression to denote *saved with difficulty*—as we would say, "a hair-breadth escape." The same expression, or similar expressions, are often used in this sense in Scripture. As, for example, "we went through fire and through water" (Psalm lxvi. 12), that is, we were in the greatest danger, we passed through circumstances of extreme peril. "When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned" (Isa. xliii. 2), that is, when thou art in extreme danger, a way of escape will be opened up. Joshua, the high priest, is compared to "a brand plucked out of the fire" (Zech. iii. 2), that is snatched from almost certain destruction (see also Amos iv. 11). And St. Jude, referring to the

<sup>1</sup> Hic locus ignem purgatorium non modo non fovet, sed plane extinguit.

mode of dealing with those who have fallen, speaks of saving them with fear, pulling them out of the fire (Jude 23), that is, rescuing them as by violence from a state of imminent peril. And, undoubtedly, such a meaning imparts an important sense, and, at first sight, appears fully justified by the passage. If a definite fire had not been previously mentioned, such would have been the meaning of the clause; but the fire is previously alluded to as the fire in which the day of the Lord shall be revealed, and as the fire which shall try every man's work; and, therefore, it must be the same fire mentioned in the clause "saved through fire." We are not, then, justified in considering it merely as a proverbial expression. The difficulty of salvation is not here prominently brought forward; on the contrary, it would rather appear that the salvation is certain, inasmuch as the man is building on the true foundation. Salvation is often in Scripture represented as a difficult attainment; we must strive to enter in at the strait gate, and the righteous scarcely are saved; but it does not appear that this is the thought contained in this passage.

4. Hence, then, we consider that the reference is to the *loss*, that those who build with worthless materials will suffer.<sup>1</sup> "They shall be saved, yet so as through fire," saved, but with the loss of all things which are consumed in the fire. "Paul," observes Meyer, "represents the builder as still busied in the building,

<sup>1</sup> There is not much difference between this interpretation and the last, except that the one emphasises the difficulty and the other the loss.



with the work which he has been carrying on ; all at once the fire seizes the building, he flees and is saved, but only as a man is saved through and from the midst of fire." Like the merchant who intrusts himself and his fortune to a vessel ; a storm arises, dashing the vessel against the rocks ; all the goods, and cargo, and lading go down to the bottom of the ocean ; the merchant is however saved, being conveyed by the life-boat, or wafted by the waves to the shore, but with the loss of all his riches—stript, empty, bare, reduced to poverty.<sup>1</sup> "Saved as through fire," the works destroyed and the workers saved. As it is said that those who were saved in the deluge were saved "through water" δι' ὕδατος (1 Pet. iii. 20), that is, through the midst of water, so here "saved through fire" διὰ πύρος, is saved through the midst of the fire of judgment.

This passage teaches us that there will be different degrees of reward in heaven. The works of some abide, and they receive a reward, whereas the works of others are burned, and they suffer loss. Both classes are saved, but the one are rewarded, and the other are saved with loss. Many who are first, who are now most prominent and most pushing in the Church, who are able debaters and zealous controversialists, who occupy the chief seats in our synagogues, will be last ; and many who are last, who are humble, modest, and retiring, who occupy no prominent position either in

<sup>1</sup> "Ut mercator naufragus, amissa merce et lucro, servatur per undas."  
—BENGEL.

the Church or in the world, who concern themselves with nothing but with preaching faithfully Christ Jesus and Him crucified, will be first. Some will enter heaven with difficulty, while to others an abundant entrance will be administered. Some will impair their inheritance of blessedness, while others will receive a full reward. Some will be nearer the throne, be possessed of larger capacities of knowing and loving God than others. Heaven is not a state of equality ; all will indeed be perfect, but the capacity of one glorified saint will be greater than that of another. Paul, who laboured more abundantly than all the apostles, who founded the Church of Christ in so many countries and cities and converted multitudes to the faith, who attained to a degree of personal holiness probably higher than that of any mortal man, and who received such rich communications of grace, will be more richly rewarded and advanced to greater glory than the penitent thief who was converted at the hour of death, and who had no opportunity of working for Christ or of exhibiting the fruits of holy living. "As one star differeth from another star in glory, so also is the resurrection of the dead."

The text also teaches us the important and often forgotten lesson of religious toleration. We are not at liberty to judge men who differ from us in their religious opinions, provided they are holding the Head, even Christ. Of course we have our own ideas of the truth ; we are bound to examine the doctrines of Christianity, and to form our own religious opinions ;

and these we are permitted anxiously to cherish as what we conceive to be the truth, earnestly to contend for against those who oppose them, and zealously to seek their diffusion. All aim at the truth, and all are bound to maintain what they conceive to be the truth. But there may be many whose religious opinions are very different from ours ; who, according to our view, have adopted errors ; who do not see things in the light in which we regard them ; who, for example, may be Arminian in their views, whilst we are Calvinistic, or *vice versa* ; but whose character may be marked by a spirituality, a purity, a heavenly-mindedness, a holiness to which we are strangers. We can recall many living, or who have lived in our days, whose religious opinions we judge to be erroneous, whom we look upon as entertaining heretical views, but with whom in point of personal holiness we are not for a moment to be compared.<sup>1</sup> Let us then judge not, lest we should be judged. "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart ; and then shall every man have praise (his due reward) from God." We should avoid all narrow-mindedness. Our sympathies ought to be large and broad. The doctrines which we sincerely hold are not necessarily true ; those from whom we differ may be nearer the truth than we. If a man is building on the true foundation ; if love and devotion

<sup>1</sup> The instance of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen will suggest itself.

to Christ are the ruling principles of his conduct ; if his character is distinguished by purity and spirituality ; let us beware of calling in question the religion of such a man, who may occupy one of the foremost seats in the kingdom of heaven, because he differs from us on certain points of doctrine.

Lastly, we see here the necessity of building well. All are in reality builders, not only the teachers, but the taught. All of us are by our actions building up our characters, whether good or bad, for eternity. Let us build on the one foundation, Jesus Christ. All structures erected on other foundations will be destroyed, and the builders themselves will perish. Such are the foolish builders, who, without a foundation, build their house upon the sand. But we must endeavour not only to build on the true foundation, but, like a wise master-builder, to build well—to employ good, solid, and substantial materials—materials which will stand the test of the fire of judgment. We must endeavour to possess the true faith, to live a holy life, and to work for Christ at once with Christian zeal and holy prudence. Errors and mistakes often pervert zeal into a means, not of advancing, but of retarding the cause of Christ ; blemishes of character often destroy the influences of otherwise good and religious persons ; and harshness and intolerance of disposition often produce a large amount of mischief, and create a prejudice against religion. It will be a sad thing when we come to die to discover that the greater part of our life has been

spent in vain, that the works which we have done will all be lost as being worthless, and although it may be we shall be saved, yet it will be with loss. It is a selfish view of life to be content to get to heaven ourselves, to be saved as through fire, but without benefiting our fellow-men, without having communicated any spiritual good, without having converted the wicked from the error of their ways, and so hiding the multitude of their sins. The loss incurred by such is not so much the loss of happiness to themselves as the loss of good to others—a life spent in vain and without profit to their fellow-men. Such may be building on the true foundation, and accordingly shall be saved ; but they are building with worthless materials, and the edifice which they are erecting will be burned up ; they shall suffer loss, and though saved, yet it will be so as through fire ; they will enter heaven with diminished glory.

## EXPOSITION VII.

### WOMEN VEILED BECAUSE OF THE ANGELS.

#### I CORINTHIANS xi. 10.

*Textus receptus.*—Διὰ τοῦτο ὀφείλει ἡ γυνὴ ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς διὰ τοὺς ἄγγέλους.

*Authorised Version.*—For this cause ought the woman to have power on *her* head, because of the angels.

*Revised Version.*—For this cause ought the woman to have *a sign of authority* on her head, because of the angels.

THE celebrated John Locke confesses that the meaning of these words of St. Paul was beyond his comprehension; and certainly few of the sayings of that great apostle have given rise to so much discussion, and to so great a diversity of opinion. But their difficulty must not deter us from attempting an explanation, especially as the object of the apostle in writing these words is perfectly obvious.

The first thing to do, in order to attain to a correct interpretation of the passage, is to consider the context. Nearly the whole of the First Epistle to the Corinthians was written for the purpose of correcting the disorders which had arisen in the Church of Corinth. One of these disorders was occasioned

by the conduct of the Corinthian women in their assemblies for public worship. It would appear that they had adopted the unseemly, and, to an Oriental, immodest custom of appearing with their heads uncovered. The practice of covering or uncovering the head at public worship was different among different nations. The men among the Jews, as is well known, cover their heads ; and that for the same reason as we uncover them, namely, as a mark of respect and reverence. It would also appear that among the Romans the men used to worship with their heads covered, whilst among the Greeks they were accustomed to uncover their heads. Accordingly, in the mixed congregation of the Corinthians, composed partly of Jewish and partly of Greek converts, there would be a want of uniformity with regard to this practice among the men ; some would pray with covered and others with uncovered heads. On the other hand, it would seem to be the universal custom among the Orientals for the women in their public assemblies to wear a veil, or at least a covering on their heads. The Corinthian women had abandoned this practice in their Christian assemblies ; many of them, in defiance of the custom of their country, and of the natural modesty of their sex, appeared with their heads uncovered, and thus gave occasion of offence to the heathen. Their reason for doing so was probably because they considered that Christianity had done away with all distinctions of sex, and had abolished the inequality between the man and the

woman, there being in Christ Jesus neither male nor female; and that, therefore, all those marks of distinction, all those symbols of subordination, should be done away with.

The Apostle sets himself to correct these disorders in the Corinthian Church. He enjoins order and decorum in their Christian assemblies. He tells them that Christianity had not abolished the natural distinction and subordination of the sexes: that, as the head of every man is Christ, so the head of the woman is the man; and, as regards the matter in question, he enjoins that in their assemblies for worship the men should appear with their heads uncovered, and the women with their heads covered. "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head (that is, Christ). But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth, having her head uncovered, dishonoureth her head (that is, the man)." The reason which he assigns for the injunction is the natural subordination of the woman; that as the man is the reflection of the glory of God, so the woman is the reflection of the glory of the man: "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man." And then follow the words which form the subject of the present exposition: "for this cause"—evidently on account of this subordination, "ought the woman to have power on *her* head, because of the angels."

The commands or injunctions of the apostle on this



practice refer to matters which do not come properly under the law of moral duties, but under the law of expediency. Abstractly and by itself there can be nothing either morally right or wrong in having the head covered or uncovered ; the matter belongs to an entirely different category from honesty, truth, forgiveness, and such like moral duties. But as it is important that religious assemblies should be orderly conducted, and that the disorders in the Corinthian Church should be suppressed ; these rules and regulations are laid down by the apostle chiefly as a matter of order. "Let all things," he observes, "be done decently and in order." "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Cor. xiv. 40, 33). In things morally indifferent, respect is to be paid to the customs of the country in which the Christians lived. In the East it was regarded as a matter, not merely of gross impropriety, but of immodesty, for women to appear with their heads uncovered in popular assemblies ; and, for this reason, for a Christian woman to do so was morally wrong. The apostle, in this epistle, frequently adverts to similar cases,—to things which in themselves were matters of indifference, but which in consequence of circumstances became morally right or wrong ; such as those questions of meats and drinks, the eating of things offered in sacrifice to idols, the abstinence from blood ; the regulations regarding which vary with circumstances and national customs. Principles, rather than things, are here involved. "All things,"

observes the apostle, "are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Cor. vi. 12).

The reading of the *textus receptus* is attested by predominant authority. Two cursive manuscripts read *οὐκ ὀφείλει*; but this is evidently a correction to escape a difficulty. Nor is there much difficulty in the translation, nor any obscurity in the purpose of the apostle. *διὰ τουτο* denotes "for this cause;" that is, on account of what has just been said concerning the subordination of the woman to the man; and hence the words which follow, "ought the woman to have power on her head," must have reference to this subordination. Perhaps *ἐξουσίαν*, might be more correctly rendered *authority*. The words which follow *διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους* have been considered by some as a gloss, since the sense is complete without them; but for this opinion there is no authority, as they are contained in all manuscripts. Some translate them as a form of oath, "by the angels;" but this is inadmissible; as to swear by the angels is opposed to apostolic teaching. It must, however, be borne in mind, especially as this will form an important element in our explanation of the verse, that the word *ἀγγέλους* admits of the translation *messengers* as well as *angels*.

There are two great exegetical difficulties connected with this verse; first, the meaning of the words, "a woman ought to have authority on her

head ;” and secondly, the import of the reason assigned for this, “because of the angels.”

I. What is meant by the woman having power or authority on her head? ὀφείλει ἡ γυνὴ ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς.

We at once discard all conjectural emendations. Any supposed change in the letters of the word ἐξουσίαν—as ἐξιοῦσα, “when she goes out ;” ἐξ οὐσίας, “according to nature,”—is completely inadmissible. Indeed, when we consider the mass of materials which we possess for ascertaining the correct reading of the text of the New Testament, conjectural emendation is in all cases inadmissible. Authority, alone, and not conjecture is the rule upon which we must go. And here the authority of manuscripts, versions, and Fathers is, without variation, in favour of ἐξουσίαν.

Whatever meaning we may assign to the words, the context proves beyond dispute that it must be an assertion of the subordination of the woman to the man. “For this cause,” on account of this subordination, “the woman ought to have authority on her head.” Accordingly, it has been ingeniously and ably maintained that ἐξουσία is an unusual word for a head-dress or veil; perhaps a Cilician provincialism.<sup>1</sup> Of course, if this could be made out, all difficulty in the expression would vanish. Indeed, in some Greek dictionaries the meaning *veil* is given, but unfortunately the only authority assigned for this

<sup>1</sup> See Michaelis, Ernesti, Hitzig, and Blomfield.

is our text. It has been argued that the Hebrew word קָרָדִיר, used for a veil or cloak (Isa. iii. 23; Cant. v. 7), is derived from the verb קָרַד, or קָרָה, which has the signification, to *subdue*; and that when Paul uses the Greek term ἐξουσία, he might have in view the Hebrew relation of the words *veil* and *subjection*. But even were this derivation of the Hebrew word for a *veil* correct, we cannot infer from it that Paul used the usual word for *authority* in the sense of *veil*. It has further been added, that the Latin word *imperium* is used to denote some female ornament, and that therefore it is possible that the cognate Greek term ἐξουσία may also have been similarly employed. Of course, it cannot be denied that this might have been the case, but there is no proof that it was so; in no writing does the word occur in the sense of a head-dress.

We are then constrained to abandon this meaning of the word, although affording so excellent a sense, and to keep to the ordinary meaning *authority*. As, however, from the context, this authority must denote the subordination of the woman to the man, we are constrained to suppose that the word is used by metonymy for the symbol of authority. "For this reason ought the woman to have the symbol of authority;" or, as the Revised Version has it, "the sign of authority on her head;" that is of the authority of the man over her; and which symbol or sign of authority, as we elsewhere learn from the context, is the covering of the head. An instance in the

Old Testament illustrates this custom. When Rebekah was informed that her destined husband Isaac, came forth to meet her, "she took a veil and covered herself," not merely from modesty, but as the symbol of her subordination. This is the meaning given by the translators of our Bible; who, for the information of their readers, attach this gloss on the margin, "a covering in sign that she is under the power of her husband."

It is not to be denied that this explanation is not entirely satisfactory. The meaning given is harsh and somewhat obscure. Besides, even when we interpret *ἐξουσία* as the symbol or sign of authority, yet one would naturally suppose that the authority spoken of belongs to the person, and not to the authority exercised over that person by another. According to the above explanation, it would appear that we almost force upon the word *ἐξουσία* a meaning directly contrary to its import,—*subordination* instead of *authority*. Meyer observes that "the context justified the use of *ἐξουσία* to denote the sign of *another's* power; the phrase thus simply having its proper reference brought out, and by no means twisted into an opposite meaning." Bishop Wordsworth gets over the difficulty by saying that "the true power of woman is in gentle submission." The context compels us to give the phrase the above interpretation of subordination. Hence the sense of the passage is: For this cause, because at creation there was a subordination of the woman to the man, and at the fall a renewal

of this subordination in the sentence, "He shall rule over you," the woman ought to bear on her head the mark of man's authority, and thus appear veiled or covered in the Christian assemblies for public worship.<sup>1</sup>

II. We now come to the more difficult clause : "because of the angels,"—*διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους*.

It is evident that without these words the sentence would be complete in itself ; the addition assigns the reason why the woman should have on her head the symbol of man's authority. A vast variety of meanings have been attached to these words, but they may be arranged under the three following clauses :—

I. Some suppose that the words refer to *real angels*; *ἀγγέλους* is here taken to denote the angels or super-human spirits, whether holy or evil angels.

The interpretation generally adopted is to refer the word to the *holy angels*, to those blessed spirits who surround the throne of God, and who, as the servants of Christ, minister to those who are the heirs of salvation. The angels are represented in Scripture as taking a lively interest in the redemption of the human

<sup>1</sup> The meaning here given is that adopted by most commentators, both of ancient and modern times ; among the Fathers and Greek commentators by Tertullian, Chrysostom, Theodoret, and Theophylact ; among the Reformers by Calvin, Luther (Luther's gloss is similar to that on the margin of our Bibles : "that is the veil or covering by which one may see that she is under her husband's authority"), and Beza ; among recent German expositors, by Bengel, Neander, Ewald, Lücke, Ruckert, Billroth, Cremer, Olshausen, De Wette, and Meyer ; and among English writers, by Doddridge, Whitby, Macknight, Conybeare, Alford, Stanley, Lias, Farrar, and Wordsworth.

race. "There is joy," our Saviour informs us, "in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke xv. 10). Especially it appears to have been the opinion of the Jews that the holy angels were present at their religious assemblies. There are some indications of this opinion in the Old Testament. Thus, the Psalmist declares, "I will praise thee with my whole heart: before the gods (that is, the angels) will I sing praise unto thee" (Ps. cxxxviii. 1). And there appears to be a similar allusion in those words of the royal Preacher: "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin: neither say thou before the angel that it was an error" (Eccl. v. 6). There is indeed no reference to this notion in the New Testament, unless, as some suppose, in 1 Tim. v. 21; but the apostle, it is supposed, adopts the Jewish opinion, as being in conformity with the word of God. The Greek Fathers often refer to the presence of the angels at public worship. "Open the eyes of faith," says St. Chrysostom, "and thou shalt behold a theatre of spectators; for, if the air is filled with angels, much more the church." Bengel supposes that the reason why the apostle names the angels is because as the angels are represented as veiling their faces before God, so women ought also to veil their faces when they worship. Such a reason, however, would apply with equal force to the men, who are enjoined to uncover their heads. Some think that the reference here is to guardian angels;<sup>1</sup> but there are no traces

<sup>1</sup> So Theophylact, Jerome, and Theodoret.

of any such allusion in this passage. The reason generally assigned is because the angels, as spectators and fellow-worshippers, are the lovers of order and subordination, and therefore all unseemliness and immodesty in worship must be offensive to them. We must have regard to them in our worship, so as by no impropriety to offend their pure natures. As Calvin puts it: "If women uncover their heads, not only Christ, but all the angels will be witnesses of the outrage. When women assume a higher place than becomes them, they gain this by it, that they discover their impudence in view of the angels of heaven;" or, as Erasmus paraphrases it: "If a woman has arrived at that pitch of shamelessness that she does not fear the eyes of men, let her at least cover her head on account of the angels who are present at your assemblies."

Such is the meaning which is generally assigned to this difficult expression. The presence of the holy angels in their assemblies is given as the reason why women should veil their faces, because, by a violation of this seemly custom, they would offend these holy spirits. But such a reason does not commend itself to our judgment; it appears to be far-fetched. St. Paul does not lay much stress elsewhere on the sentiments of the angels; he employs reasons far stronger and more telling. Indeed, he deprecates anything approaching to a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels. We, at least, would never think of censuring unseemly conduct at public



worship, by telling the worshippers that they ought to conduct themselves in a more orderly manner, because the holy angels were present among them. Such a reason would be destitute of force, as being too indefinite and transcendental.

Accordingly, many expositors suppose that not *holy* but *evil* angels are referred to. They suppose that the apostle here accommodates himself to, or adopts, a notion then undoubtedly prevalent among the Jews, and afterwards embraced by the early Fathers, that the sin of at least a portion of the fallen angels consisted in their yielding themselves up to human love. This extravagant notion arose from a gross misconception of those words of Scripture wherein we are told that "the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose" (Gen. vi. 2). In the Alexandrian manuscript of the Septuagint, the words "sons of God" are rendered "angels of God." This notion is largely dwelt upon in the apocryphal Book of Enoch, the greater part of which is generally admitted to have been written before the Christian era, and some suppose is adopted by Jude, who quotes from that book. To this rabbinical notion it is supposed the apostle refers; women should veil themselves, because they might tempt or be tempted by the evil angels. This is the interpretation which is directly given by Tertullian: "It is on account of the angels that he saith, women must be veiled, because on account of the daughters of men, angels

revolted from God." The same opinion appears to be adopted by no less an authority than Archdeacon Farrar. "There can," he observes, "I think, be no shadow of doubt in the unprejudiced mind of any reader who is familiar with these Jewish views of the subject in which Paul had been trained, that he is referring to the common rabbinical interpretation of Gen. vi. 2, where the Targum, and, indeed, all the Jewish authorities down to the author of the Book of Enoch, attached the fall of angels to their guilty love for earthly women." A modification of this view, softening its grossness, is also adopted by Dean Stanley, who thus paraphrases our passage: "Therefore the authority of man is to be seen visibly resting on her head in the covering which shrouds her from the view of these angelic beings who, as we read in the same primeval records, were the first to break through the sacred relations of man and wife, the first to entice her from that subjection to which God had appointed her." So also Macknight supposes that the reference is not to the Jewish notion of the fall of angels, but to the seduction of the woman by the artifices of the serpent; and that the wearing of the veil was to be the perpetual monument of her fall, and of her subjection to man in consequence. "Eve," he observes, "having been seduced by evil angels to eat the forbidden fruit, she and all her daughters were punished for that sin, by being subjected to the rule of their husbands. The apostle, therefore, enjoined the Eastern women,

according to whose custom the wearing of a veil was a token of subjection, to be veiled in the public assemblies for worship, that, remembering their first mother's seduction by evil angels, they might be sensible of their own frailty, and behave with humility."<sup>1</sup>

But neither do we think that this interpretation is the correct one. We cannot imagine that either St. Jude, or far less the Apostle Paul, adopted that gross and extravagant notion of the rabbinical writers and of the author of the Book of Enoch. Nor does the more moderate view, that the reference is to the seduction of Eve, recommend itself; for this seduction was not effected by evil spirits in general, but by one pre-eminently,—namely, the devil. And, in general, if evil angels were meant, we would expect some statement to that effect by the apostle, as “the angels that sinned,” “the angels that kept not their first estate.”

2. Accordingly, some suppose that the word here rendered *angels* does not refer to the angelic spirits, whether good or evil, but that it is used with reference to the *ministers*, or Christian prophets, who were specially set apart to conduct the worship of the congregation. The name angel, it is said, is conferred on ministers both in the Old and in the New Testament. Thus in the prophecy of Malachi we read: “The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is

<sup>1</sup> A similar interpretation is adopted by Whitby.

the messenger (or angel) of the Lord of Hosts" (Mal. ii. 7). And in the book of the Revelation we read of the angels of the seven churches, which appellation has been supposed to refer to the bishops or presidents of these churches. Such a name is also sufficiently appropriate, as ministers are the messengers or ambassadors of God. The reason then here assigned is, that women should veil their faces, lest they should draw away the affections or distract the attention of the ministers or presidents of the assemblies.

To this opinion, however, it is justly objected that the name *ἄγγελοι* is never given to ministers in the New Testament; certainly never by the Apostle Paul. He calls them *ἀπόστολοι ἐκκλησιῶν* (2 Cor. viii. 22), but never *ἄγγελοι ἐκκλησιῶν*. Nor is it at all obvious that by the angels of the Apocalyptic Churches the ministers or bishops are meant. We cannot, then, suppose that the reference here is to ministers,—a reference which does not elsewhere occur.

3. Others suppose that the reference is to the *messengers* or *spies* sent by the heathen into the public assemblies of Christians. It must be remembered that the word *ἄγγελος* denotes a *messenger* as well as an *angel*; and that it is from the context alone that we can determine which of the two meanings is correct. In the New Testament the word frequently occurs in the sense of messenger. Thus, in reference to the Baptist, it is said: "This is he of whom it is written, Behold I send My messenger (*τὸν*

ἀγγελὸν μου) before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" (Matt. xi. 10). So, also, the name is given to the disciples whom the Baptist sent to inquire of Jesus whether He were the Messiah, "And when the messengers (ἀγγέλων) of John were departed" (Luke vii. 24). And it is said of Jesus that on His last journey to Jerusalem He sent messengers (ἀγγέλους) before His face (Luke ix. 52). But the most remarkable passage, and the one which bears most closely on our subject, is in the Epistle of James, where this very word is applied to the spies whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho: "Likewise, also, was not Rahab the harlot justified by works when she had received the messengers (ἀγγέλους), and sent them out another way" (Jas. ii. 25); whereas, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, when reference to the same incident is made, the word (κατασκοποῦς) *spies* is employed (Heb. xi. 31). In all these passages it is evident that ἄγγελοι must denote *messengers*, as it refers not to supernatural agents, but to human beings.

Now, it is argued that this is the meaning of the term here; women, in their assemblies for worship, ought to veil their faces because of the messengers. The messengers here meant are the heathen spies; and just as the spies sent by Joshua are called ἀγγέλους, so also may the spies sent by the heathen be so termed. Tertullian informs us that the heathen were in the habit of sending spies or messengers to observe what was said or done in their Christian

assemblies ; and indeed, nothing was more natural than that they should do so, as the religious assemblies of the Christians were open to the public. According to this view, the apostle exhorts the Corinthians to see that their assemblies are conducted with proper order—that all unseemly practices, all offensive attitudes, all violations of what was called decorum in dress, everything approaching to immodesty be avoided ; he tells them to remember that the eyes of the heathen are upon them ; that their conduct is narrowly watched, and that the least deviation from the rules of propriety would be observed, and blackened, and exaggerated ; and that the messengers or spies of their heathen adversaries were often present in their assemblies. This, we consider, is the true meaning of the passage, and it affords an adequate reason why the Corinthians should be very careful of the manner in which they conducted their worship ; that reason being because they were watched. It is a meaning which is only adopted by a few expositors,<sup>1</sup> but it recommends itself to us as that which best satisfies all the requirements of the case. The only strong objection brought against it is that *ἄγγελοι*, when standing absolutely in the New Testament, always denotes good angels. But we consider this an assertion which has not been demonstrated. When St. Paul says, “ Know ye not that we shall judge angels ? ” (1 Cor. vi. 3), it is only by referring the term to evil angels that we can obtain

<sup>1</sup> Among these are Rosenmüller and Schrader.

any true sense. Accordingly, we do not think that there is anything in the context to prevent us maintaining that ἀγγέλους is here to be translated *messengers*.

This portion of St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, regulating the order of public worship, is very valuable. The public worship of the Corinthian Church appears to have degenerated into a scene of confusion; the Lord's Supper was degraded into an ordinary meal; many spoke at once in the church; some uttered incoherent ejaculations; even women as well as men prophesied; and, in violation of the customs of their country, and forgetful of the natural modesty of their sex, they appeared with uncovered heads. The apostle uses a variety of arguments, and lays down various regulations, to repress these disorders. He tells them that God is the author of order and not of confusion; he specifies the order and the due subordination to be observed; and he here reminds them of the watchful eye of the world. Indeed, it would appear that one great reason for the establishment of the Christian ministry—for setting apart a body of men to conduct public worship—was for the sake of order. One of the great properties of the charity which the Gospel inculcates is that it "doth not behave itself unseemly"—does nothing to offend those rules that regulate the order or secure the peace of society.

Lastly, we may take notice of the apostle's attention to minute matters. He gives instructions even

about the attire of women and their personal appearance ; he gives rules about eating and drinking ; he lays down regulations about feasting ; nothing seems too minute to be beyond his observation. We must not consider such things to be beneath the notice of the apostle, or that attending to them indicated littleness of mind. On the contrary, this attention to little matters was the mark of the greatness of his mind. All great men are attentive to small details, knowing that it is only by such minuteness that exactness can be attained, and that complete success can crown their efforts. And certainly St. Paul was not one who overlooked small matters ; for he well knew that attention to small things often leads to great results, while inattention might lead to discomfiture and failure.



## EXPOSITION VIII.

### BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD.

#### I CORINTHIANS xv. 29.

*Textus receptus.*—Ἐπεὶ τί ποιήσουσιν οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν, εἰ ὅλως νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται ; τί καὶ βαπτίζονται ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν.

*Authorised Version.*—Else what shall they do which are baptised for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptised for the dead?

*Revised Version.*—Else what shall they do which are baptised for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptised for them?

THE obscurities of the New Testament do not arise, as is the case with many of the obscurities in classical writings, from any uncertainty as to the original text ; at least this is not a prominent cause of obscurity ; for, notwithstanding the extraordinary number of various readings, thanks to the labours of Lachmann, Tischendorf, and Tregelles, we now possess a text which to all intents and purposes is restored to its original purity. Nor do many of these obscurities arise from a defective knowledge of the language in which the New Testament was written ; for, although

there are but few remains of that particular dialect of the Greek used by the sacred writers, yet such is the accuracy of scholars that in general there is little reason to doubt that the true meaning of the words has been ascertained. But, among other reasons, three may especially be assigned for our difficulty in understanding certain Scriptural passages. First, there is undeniably a certain obscurity in the style of many of the sacred writers. This is obviously the case in the epistles of St. Paul. That great apostle was careless about style; his impetuous spirit hurried him along; he often deserts the subject in which he is engaged, and introduces a long digression, as if some new thought had struck him, and then without any notice returns to his original subject. This creates a difficulty in following his train of thought, and, of course, in understanding his meaning. Instances of such Pauline digressions are numerous, and must suggest themselves to every critical reader. A second cause of obscurity is our ignorance of the customs and modes of thought prevalent among the early converts. In order thoroughly to understand the Epistles, we must put ourselves in the position of those to whom the apostle wrote, understand their views, and be acquainted with their practices. But we are lamentably ignorant of the age immediately succeeding that of the apostles. A period of nearly forty years intervenes between the writings of the New Testament and the writings of the early Fathers, with the solitary exception of the short Epistle of St. Clement. Hence

the sacred writers may often allude to customs which have left no trace in the history of the Church, and to modes of thought of which we are entirely ignorant. But the chief cause of obscurity is the novelty and sublimity of the truths revealed. The apostles advert to truths formerly unthought of in the heathen world, and hence the Greek terms which the sacred writers were forced to employ must have been often inadequate to express the sentiments they intended to convey. And, besides, there are other revealed truths of so sublime a nature as to lie beyond the sphere of human intelligence, and the statement and elucidation of these must often be difficult of comprehension.

The passage selected for exposition is one of those obscure statements of Scripture: "Else what shall they do which are baptised for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptised for the dead?" What does the apostle mean by being baptised for the dead? What is the nature of this baptism? How are we to interpret the word *dead*? Are we to give to these terms a natural or a metaphorical signification? These questions naturally arise, and accordingly there are few passages in the New Testament which have given rise to such a variety of explanations. More than twenty interpretations might be mentioned, each having the authority of some distinguished divine, and each defended by plausible reasons. Indeed, some of these interpretations are so plausible, that although only one can be correct, it is difficult to give a preference to one more than to

another. Hence great caution, as well as great candour, are requisite in our endeavours to ascertain the true interpretation.

The first thing to be done, in the way of interpretation, is to discover the connection of the passage. When attentively read, it is seen to be wholly unconnected with what immediately precedes. We have here one of those digressions of St. Paul which so frequently occur in his epistles, and which, as we have already observed, form one great cause of obscurity in his writings. He is reasoning concerning the reality of the resurrection, but he interrupts his argument by a digression on the order of the resurrection, and now he goes back on the passage under discussion and resumes his reasoning. We would connect this twenty-ninth verse with the twentieth, and consider the whole intervening passage from verse twenty-one to verse twenty-eight as a parenthesis, which, according to the style of modern writing, would have been attached as a note. The apostle has been speaking of the vanity of the Christian life apart from the resurrection: "If, in this life only, we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept;" and then, after a digression on the order of the resurrection, suggested by the word *first-fruits*, he resumes his argument. "Else," if Christ be not risen, "what shall they do which are baptised for the dead?" Dean Stanley strangely imagines that "the confusion may possibly have arisen from some actual interrup-

tion in the writing or the material of the letter." But whilst the passage is thus disconnected with what immediately precedes, it is directly connected with what follows, "And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?" If Christ be not risen, what is the use of enduring sufferings for our profession of faith in Him?

The next point in the interpretation is to ascertain the train of thought in the apostle's reasoning in favour of the resurrection. There were some among his Corinthian converts who called in question the resurrection of the dead, either affirming that it was already past, assigning to it a metaphorical meaning—a resurrection from dead works; or maintaining that it would never occur—that it was an impossibility. Now the apostle addresses three arguments in proof of the resurrection. His first and chief argument, upon which he puts the greatest stress, is that derived from the resurrection of Christ. "If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen." And if this be the case, Christianity rests on a false foundation, "your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins." In testifying to the resurrection of Christ "we are found false witnesses of God." But we have the most convincing proofs from numerous and unquestionable witnesses, that Christ has risen from the dead, and this His resurrection is a proof and pledge of ours. His second argument is, that if there be no resurrection and no future state, then those believers who have died are annihilated. "Then they also which have fallen asleep in Christ are perished;" their Christianity has done

them no good, or rather, as it is inseparably connected with self-denial and suffering, it has augmented the misery of human existence: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." But this is a consequence which cannot be admitted: "Christ is risen from the dead, and is become the first-fruits of them that slept." And analogous to this, the apostle adduces a third argument, that if there be no resurrection, all the trials and sufferings of believers are useless; not the practice of the Christians, but the maxim of the Epicureans is reasonable: "Why stand we in jeopardy every hour? If, after the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die"—an inference which is to be rejected with horror; "Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners." Now, it is evident that it is to this third argument that the passage under consideration belongs, namely, the uselessness of the sufferings of believers if there be no resurrection. Hence, then, we consider that a preference is to be given to the interpretation which suits that argument: baptism for the dead must be connected with the sufferings of believers.

There is not much variety in the readings of the passage. The only point of importance is that instead of *ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν* in the second clause, the true reading is *ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν*;<sup>1</sup> "Else what shall they do

<sup>1</sup> This reading is attested by all the best MSS., and is undoubtedly correct.

which are baptised for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they baptised for them?" an alteration which occasions no difference in the sense. So also the translation given in our version is tolerably accurate. The conjunction *ἐπεὶ*, translated "else," might be properly rendered "since;" or "this being the case." *Οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι*, "they who are baptised," denotes a particular class of Christians. The word *dead* is in the plural, *τῶν νεκρῶν*; not a dead person, but dead persons. But the chief thing to be attended to is the force of the preposition *ὑπὲρ*. Its primary meaning when it governs the genitive is *over* or *above*; but, unless our passage be an exception, it is never used in this local sense in the New Testament; it is always used figuratively. In this sense it almost always denotes "for the sake of," "on behalf of." Thus: "for their sakes (*ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν*) I sanctify myself" (John xvii. 19). So also in Rom. i. 5; Eph. iii. 13; Phil. i. 29; Col. iii. 24; 2 Thess. i. 5, &c. More rarely, but still closely connected with the above meaning, it signifies "instead of;" as, for instance, in 2 Cor. v. 20: "We pray you in Christ's stead (*ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ*) be ye reconciled to God;" and in Philemon 13: "Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead (*ὑπὲρ σοῦ*) he might have ministered unto me." Hence the most literal translation of the verse is: Since what shall the baptised for the sake of (instead of) the dead do? If the dead rise not at all, why are they baptised for the sake of (instead of) them?

Nor is there any difficulty in ascertaining the

meaning of the words taken separately. *Τί ποιήσουσιν* evidently imports: What is the object or use of their doing? What profit or advantage will result from it? What will they gain? It is also evident that the baptism here spoken of is to be taken literally; not figuratively as a baptism of fire, but the Christian baptism—baptism into the faith of Christ, into a belief of His religion. Some expositors suppose that the word *dead* (*νεκρῶν*) is to be taken figuratively for the spiritually dead. But this would involve the grievous anomaly, that the same word is to be taken figuratively in one part of the passage and literally in another; for it is evident that in the clause, “If the dead rise not at all?” the word must be taken literally to denote those who are actually dead.

In adverting to the different interpretations which have been given to “being baptised for the dead” (*βαπτιζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν*), we may discard at once and without further examination all those which give a figurative sense either to the word *baptised* or to the word *dead*, as being wholly inadmissible. As, for instance, those which regard the word *baptised* in the sense of afflicted, the interpretation adopted by Dr. Macknight. “What shall they do to repair their loss who are immersed in sufferings for testifying the resurrection of the dead, if the dead rise not at all? And what inducement can they have to suffer death for believing the resurrection of the dead?” The reference is certainly to the sufferings of believers, but the words do not admit of this



figurative interpretation. So also those interpretations are to be rejected which consider the word *dead* to denote either the spiritually dead, "What shall they gain who are baptised in order to convert those who are dead in sins?"<sup>1</sup> or dead works, "What shall they gain who are baptised for the removal of their dead works?" So also several other interpretations are in themselves so evidently improbable or so manifestly erroneous that the mention and consideration of them need not detain us. We shall examine seven interpretations which appear plausible, reserving what we consider the correct interpretation to the last.

I. A very common interpretation is that which considers Christ as here referred to under the designation *dead*. "What shall they do which are baptised for the dead?" that is for Christ. This is the meaning which is usually adopted by uncritical writers; nor does it want the weight of critical authority, for it is the view taken by Whitby in his learned commentary. It assumes two forms. What shall they do who are baptised for the dead, that is, for Christ? If there be no resurrection, if the dead rise not at all, then is Christ not risen: He is dead, He is still in the grave; those who are baptised into His name, are baptised into the name of a dead Christ. He cannot help Himself, and therefore He cannot help us. Or, as this interpretation has been otherwise considered, those who are baptised into Christ are, as the apostle elsewhere expresses it, "baptised into His death"

<sup>1</sup> Hofmann.

(Rom. vi. 3), as being the great sacrifice for sin ; but if Christ be not risen what shall they gain who are thus baptised into his death ? His death is without efficacy ; no possible merit can arise from it.

Either of these views of this interpretation, referring the term *dead* to Christ, affords a good sense, one which well agrees with the argument of the apostle, and is not altogether at variance with the connection ; either of them shows the uselessness of a profession of Christianity made by baptism to Christ, if there be no resurrection. But the fatal objection to this application of the term *dead* to Christ is that the word is not in the singular,—the dead one, namely, Christ,—but in the plural,—dead persons, those who are dead. Also the preposition *ὑπὲρ* cannot possibly mean “into,” as the above interpretation requires, but “for the sake of,” or more rarely “instead of.” Baptism is not said to be *ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ*, but *εἰς Χριστόν*. To admit of the above interpretation, the words would require to be *εἰς τὸν νεκρόν*. For these reasons we can have no hesitation in concluding that the interpretation, which refers the term *dead* to Christ, is completely inadmissible.

2. A second and more plausible interpretation refers the word *dead* to the resurrection of the dead, and reads the clause thus : “What shall they gain who are baptised for the hope of the resurrection of the dead, if the dead rise not at all ?” Baptism, it is argued, is not only a declaration of our belief in the resurrection, but a figurative or symbolical represen-

tation of it. "We are," says the apostle, "buried with Christ by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. vi. 4, 5). And the same idea is expressed in the Epistle to the Colossians: "Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead" (Col. ii. 12). But if there be no resurrection of the dead, to what purpose our baptism? It has lost its significance. This was the interpretation generally adopted by the Fathers. Thus Tertullian observes: "To be baptised for the dead means to be baptised for the body, because it is the body which becomes dead. What then shall they do who are baptised for the body, if the body rise not again?" (Adv. Marcion, v. 10). And so also St. Chrysostom expresses himself in the following eloquent terms: "When we have instructed the catechumen in the Divine mysteries of the Gospel, and are about to baptise him, we command him to say, 'I believe in the resurrection of the body.' And he is baptised in this faith. This is what St. Paul recalls to their memory. If there is no resurrection of the body, why are you baptised for the dead? Why are you baptised in the profession that they will rise from the grave? You, on your part, proclaim their resurrection, and the priest, on his side, represents it. For your immersion into the water at baptism, and your emersion from it, is a figure of the resurrection of the dead. God raises you from the

grave of sin by the laver of regeneration in baptism, and thus gives you a pledge of the resurrection which you profess. If, then, there is no resurrection of the body, all that is done in baptism on behalf of the dead is a mere theatrical show. What then will they do who are baptised for the dead, and in the profession on their behalf that they will rise from the grave? They will have been cheated by an idle delusion.”<sup>1</sup>

Now certainly this interpretation gives a good meaning, suited to the argument of the apostle ; for if there be no resurrection of the dead, baptism into the belief, and as a representation of it, is a useless ceremony. Nor does the preposition here entirely lose its meaning ; for as Bishop Wordsworth observes : “Baptism was a practical argument, ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν, for the dead. Believers were baptised *in behalf of the dead*, and in their vindication. They justified them from the charge of folly in grounding their hopes on a vain and false foundation.” But the great objection to this interpretation is that it gives a somewhat figurative meaning to the term *dead* ; it introduces the word resurrection, so that, according to this view, the words are not simply, “What shall they do who are baptised for the dead?” but “What shall they do who are baptised for the resurrection of the dead?” that is, in the hope of its occurrence. And therefore, for this reason, we consider the above interpretation also as inadmissible.

3. A third interpretation is to consider that the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Bishop Wordsworth.

reference here is to the practice among the early Christians of deferring baptism until death. Accordingly the passage is thus paraphrased: What shall they gain who are baptised at the moment of death, with a view to their state when dead? This meaning has been adopted and defended by Calvin. "Those," he observes, "are baptised for the dead, who are looked upon as already dead, and who have altogether despaired of life. It is well known to us from the very commencement of the Church, those who had, while yet catechumens, fallen into disease, if their life was manifestly in danger, were accustomed to ask baptism, that they might not leave this world before they had made a profession of Christianity; and this in order that they might carry with them the seal of their salvation. They were baptised for the dead, inasmuch as it could not be of any service to them in this world, and the very occasion of their asking baptism was that they despaired of life." Now, it is certain that baptism on a death-bed was practised in early Christianity. Many deferred their baptism and their open avowal of Christianity until near death, either from conscientious motives, because they were afraid that they would not be able to live up to the holy profession made at baptism; or from superstitious views, because they thought there was some efficacy in baptism to remove or wash away their past sins, so that if they were baptised immediately before death they would enter pure into the presence of God. We need only refer to the notable example

of Constantine, who delayed his baptism until his last illness. The practice certainly degenerated into gross superstition, and was the occasion of much abuse, leading men to continue in sin, supposing that if baptised in the moment of death their sins would be forgiven them. But, it is argued, that at first, in the time of the apostle, the practice was not superstitious. It arose from conscientious motives, from scruples of conscience which were to be respected, from a salutary dread of the instability of one's resolutions, from a fear of bringing dishonour on the name of Christ; and perhaps, also, from the jealousy of the office-bearers of the Church, who would not confer baptism until the character of the catechumens was thoroughly tested and their knowledge advanced. If, then, the baptism of a catechumen had for some conscientious reasons, either on his own part or on the part of the Church, been deferred, and if his last sickness overtook him, it was evidently his duty to be baptised at death; he himself would receive the comforts which arise from that holy ordinance, and he would edify the Church by the declaration of his faith at the hour of death, and in being thus baptised he was baptised for the sake of the dead—with a view to death.

Here, also, no fault can be found with the appropriateness of the above interpretation. Although the practice of baptism at death soon degenerated into superstition, yet we can easily imagine that there was at first nothing wrong or superstitious about it, and it is not legitimate to argue against a practice from

its abuse. Certainly, in the apostolic age some might be baptised with a view to death. It is also evident that this meaning suits the apostle's argument, for such a baptism at death would have been a useless ceremony were there no resurrection from the dead. But the great objection to this interpretation is that the word *dead* is modified: it is used in the sense of death, and denotes, not those who are already dead, which is its evident meaning, but those who are about to die. For this reason the above interpretation does not come up to the full sense of the passage.

4. A fourth interpretation is that advanced in a sermon by Dr. Somerville of Jedburgh,<sup>1</sup> an interpretation which we have not found elsewhere, and which he himself observes is "unsupported by the authority of any ancient or modern expositor."<sup>2</sup> He interprets the phrase "baptism for the dead," "in the view or expectation of receiving their dead friends again;" in other words, baptised with a view to reunion with the dead. "What shall they do who are baptised for the sake of the dead?" that is, who have become Christians from a desire to regain their dear and departed friends in another and better world. Dr. Somerville supposes that several of the early converts may have been induced to become Christians on

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Somerville was in his days a noted minister. He wrote a history of the reign of Queen Anne. His memoirs are edited by Professor Lee of Glasgow. He was the father-in-law of the celebrated Mrs. Somerville,

<sup>2</sup> A somewhat similar interpretation is mentioned by Meyer, as having been maintained by Köster.

account of the consolation which the Gospel afforded to those mourning over the loss of near relatives. The death of friends was to the heathen a calamity without any mitigation, and hence we read on their tombstones the most desponding sentiments. Now, suppose a heathen family mourning over the loss of some beloved one; they can derive no comfort from their own dark religion; no ray of hope penetrates through the darkness of heathenism beyond the grave; death is to them an eternal separation. But they hear the message of the Gospel; they listen to these words, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on Me, though he were dead yet shall he live;" they are told that death is not an eternal separation—that friends separated by death will be re-united in a better world. This comforting assurance is like oil poured on their breaking hearts; the desire of meeting their departed friends induces them to embrace Christianity; they are baptised for the sake of the dead. The motive, indeed, may not be a very high one, but it leads to something better—to a confession of faith in Christ.

Such an explanation is very ingenious. It is in full accordance with the argument of the apostle. It gives the preposition *ὑπὲρ* its full meaning, "for the sake of." And, so far as it appears, there is no strain put on the apostle's statement: "What shall they do who are baptised," who become Christians, "for the sake of the dead"—out of affection to them, and with the hope of rejoining them—"if the dead



rise not? Why are they baptised for the sake of them?" But this interpretation is far-fetched; it is not one which would naturally suggest itself; indeed, it has not suggested itself to any of the numerous expositors who have attempted to explain these words of the apostle; its very ingenuity is a presumption against it. Besides, there must have been few among the heathen who became Christians from such a motive. Nor does this meaning suit the connection, as there is no reference in such an interpretation to the sufferings of believers.

5. A fifth interpretation is to suppose a reference to a custom among the early Christians of baptising their converts over the graves of martyrs. This is Luther's explanation, and has been adopted by Ewald and other writers: "to confirm the resurrection, the Christians had themselves baptised over the graves of the dead." Accordingly, the passage is thus rendered, "What shall they do who are baptised over (*ὑπὲρ*) the dead?" In the Lutheran version, the passage is thus rendered: "Was machen sonst, die sich taufen lassen über der Todten?" The full force of the preposition *ὑπὲρ* is thus given; it is rendered according to its primary meaning *over*.

It is no objection to this interpretation to say with Meyer that it is inadmissible, because the preposition *ὑπὲρ* nowhere else occurs in the New Testament in this local sense of *over*; for as Winer remarks: "Might not the preposition be used with this simple local meaning in a single passage only?" But the

great objection is, that this meaning rests on a custom which is elsewhere unknown in the early Christian Church ; and although it may be asserted that such a custom might have existed, though all traces of it are lost, yet it was a gross superstition, and we cannot suppose that the apostle would have employed it as an argument in favour of the resurrection.

6. A sixth interpretation, and the one which has the preponderance of learned critics in its favour, is that which supposes that the apostle here alludes to the custom of vicarious baptism ; the practice of believers in the Corinthian Church of submitting to baptism as substitutes on behalf of believing friends who had died without baptism. What shall they do who are baptised on behalf of the dead as their substitutes? What is the use of such a custom?<sup>1</sup> There are traces of such a practice in early Christianity, although it was always regarded by the Fathers as a superstition, and adopted only by the Marcionites and other heretical sects. Thus Tertullian (*De Resurr.* 48) alludes to it, when he says : “ They adopted this practice (of being baptised in room of the dead) with such a presumption as made them suppose that the vicarious baptism would be beneficial to the flesh of another in anticipation of the resurrection.” Chrysostom, in a curious passage, quoted by Dean Stanley, informs us that, “ after a catechumen was dead, they hid a living man under

<sup>1</sup> This opinion is adopted by Winer, Billroth, Rückert, Meyer, De Wette, Alford, Conybeare, and Stanley.

the bed of the deceased ; then coming to the dead man, they spoke to him, and asked him whether he would receive baptism ; and he making no answer, the other replied in his stead, and so they baptised the living for the dead." And Epiphanius mentions that among the heretics in Asia and Galatia, there was a practice, when any of them died without baptism, to baptise others in their name, lest in the resurrection they should suffer punishment as unbaptised. It is asserted that this is the only meaning that the Greek will admit of ; it gives the full force of the preposition, "for the sake of." The custom was undoubtedly a gross superstition, as if one could be baptised for another, or undertake to be a Christian for another. But it is affirmed, that the apostle mentions it without note of approbation ; he merely alludes to it as an argument personal to themselves, *argumentum ad hominem*. If there be no resurrection of the dead, what is the use of that custom practised by some of you of being baptised for the sake of your deceased relatives? Just, in a similar manner as our Saviour, who, accused by the Pharisees of casting out devils through Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, says : "And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges." So here, without any note of approval : If there be no resurrection, why do you suffer yourselves to be baptised as substitutes for the dead? Out of your own mouths do I judge you.

It is admitted that the above interpretation correctly represents the meaning of the words, and is perhaps that which would at first suggest itself, namely, that if a convert to Christianity happened to die unbaptised, a Christian might volunteer to be his substitute and representative, and so might have the baptismal rite administered to him on behalf of his deceased friend. But the great objection to this view is, that it is no argument at all; this baptism for the sake of the dead was itself erroneous, and what is itself false cannot be adduced as an argument in favour of a truth. Besides there does not appear to be any mark of disapprobation of such a superstition on the part of the apostle. Dean Alford, indeed, asserts that in the words *τί ποιήσουσιν* there is a tacit reprehension; yet this is far from evident. On the other hand, Dean Stanley admits the want of any disapproval, and attempts to justify the apostle's language, as "an instance of accommodation to the feelings and opinions of those addressed, without any expression of condemnation on his part." But it would rather appear that the apostle, by adopting this custom as an argument, far from disapproving of it, gives countenance to it, and admits that if there were a resurrection from the dead, the dead would profit by substitutes being baptised instead of them. And certainly, especially in the Epistle to the Corinthians, it was St. Paul's custom to mention the abuses which prevailed in the Corinthian Church only with a view sharply to correct and rebuke them. "There is," observes Frederick Robertson, "an

immense improbability that Paul could have sustained a superstition so abject, even by an allusion. He could not have even spoken of it without anger." For these reasons this interpretation, notwithstanding the high authority by which it is supported, does not satisfy us as the correct explanation.

7. A seventh interpretation, and the one which, on the whole, appears to us the best, consists in supposing that what is meant is baptism to fill the place of the dead: "What shall they do who are baptised instead of the dead?"<sup>1</sup> The apostle represents one set of Christians succeeding another; when their ranks were thinned by death, others rushed in to supply their place. The hardships and sufferings to which their deceased friends had been exposed, did not deter others from taking their place, and exposing themselves to the same hardships and sufferings. But, asks the apostle, if there be no resurrection of the dead, why do the baptised take the places of the dead? Why do they voluntarily submit to like suffering for their faith? Why are they baptised in room of the dead? Such an interpretation agrees well with what follows: "And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your (our) rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?" Indeed, this is the only

<sup>1</sup> This opinion is adopted by Hammond, Doddridge, Olshausen, and others.

interpretation which fully agrees with the immediate context ; it connects the baptism for the dead with the sufferings of believers, and this is a strong presumption in favour of its correctness.

But before adopting this explanation, there are several objections to be disposed of:—1. It is objected that “the question of the apostle would thus be irrelevant, because the place of the dead being supplied by their successors, it would be no matter to them whether the dead rose or not” (Alford). But the answer to this objection is obvious. The apostle has in view the sufferings which are necessarily involved in supplying the place of the dead, and which sufferings would be useless if the dead rose not ; whereas, if there be a resurrection of the dead, these sufferings will be amply recompensed in another world. 2. It is objected that the preposition *ὑπέρ* is not used in its true signification ; it is used instead of *ἀντὶ*, and made to denote “instead of,” “in the room of,” whereas its true meaning is “for the sake of.” But we have seen from examples that *ὑπέρ* has occasionally the meaning “instead of” (2 Cor. v. 20 ; Phil. 13). And in the following passage from Dionysius Halicarnasis, there is an exact example of this use of *ὑπέρ* : “They agreed to enlist soldiers in the room of those who had died in the war” (*ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀποθανόντων στρατιωτῶν*). Besides these two meanings run into one another ; Christians who are baptised instead of the dead may also be said to be baptised for the sake of the dead, or on their account, seeing they have taken their

place: 3. It is further objected that the word *οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι* denotes a particular class of Christians, whereas according to the above interpretation they refer to all. It is admitted that the reference is to Christians generally; but, in answer to the objection it may be observed that Christians are here, as it were, particularised; they are represented as those who supply the place of the dead, who succeed them.

And what a truly noble idea does this interpretation give us of Christians! They are baptised in the room of the dead. They are their successors, their followers, they step into their places, they occupy their ground, they fill up their ranks, they fight in the battle in which their companions have fallen. And, especially in the season of persecution, what a touching scene it must have been to see the baptised rushing into the ranks of those who have fallen, nobly enduring the same sufferings, meeting the same doom, like soldiers occupying the breach which death had made in their ranks, thus verifying the observation of the Fathers, that "the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church."

And so also this interpretation gives us a striking view of the nature of baptism. "Baptised in the room of the dead." Baptism thus unites the baptised living with the baptised dead; it constitutes us the successors of those who have gone before; it is the ceremony of our enrolment into the great army of the living God; it ensures the perpetuity of the Church, and supplies it with a constant succession of those who

bear the name of Jesus. Baptism also binds us to do the work of those holy men and women who have died in the Lord ; it is a solemn consecration to the service of Christ ; it puts us in the place of the dead ; it imposes upon us those duties which they in their life performed, and enables us to look forward with hope to those rewards which they now enjoy.



## EXPOSITION IX.

### PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH.

2 CORINTHIANS xii. 7.

*Textus receptus.*—Καὶ τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι, ἐδόθη μοι σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί, ἄγγελος Σατᾶν ἵνα με κολαφίζῃ, ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι.

*Authorised Version.*—And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

*Revised Version.*—And by reason of the exceeding greatness of the revelations—wherefore, that I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch.

THERE are many allusions in St. Paul's epistles, which, on account of our ignorance of the circumstances under which they were written, are, in a great measure, unintelligible to us; but were perfectly intelligible to those to whom the apostle wrote. Of this nature is the prediction of the Man of Sin, recorded in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, which must be allowed to be perhaps the most obscure passage in the writings of St. Paul. But this passage, so obscure to us, was not necessarily obscure to the Thessalonians,

as the apostle had explained himself when in Thessalonica: "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?" (2 Thess. ii. 5). We are ignorant because we want the information which was imparted to them. So also the Corinthians would be in no doubt with regard to the Christ-party, who, in distinction from the parties of Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, styled themselves "of Christ" (1 Cor. i. 12), because these existed within the Church of Corinth; whereas this has given rise to a multitude of suppositions among modern divines. And so also, in the matter proposed for consideration, the Corinthians would be perfectly aware of what St. Paul meant by "the thorn in the flesh," which proved a hindrance to his preaching the gospel, and which was visible to all, because he laboured under such an infirmity when he was with them in Corinth. Nay more, the knowledge of these early Churches is the cause of our ignorance. In all these three instances, the obscurity is occasioned by the circumstance that the subjects alluded to were so well known to the Churches addressed. These were points on which those to whom St. Paul wrote required no information.

There is a difference in the reading in the MSS., which gives rise to a corresponding difference in the translation. Many of the best MSS. insert *διὸ* after *ἀποκαλύψεων*, a reading adopted by Lachmann, Westcott and Hort, and the Revisers, but rejected by Tischendorf (seventh and eighth editions), Meyer, and

Alford. And the last clause, ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι, is omitted in most of our best MSS., but retained by most of the editors of the text. The insertion of διὸ gives rise to the rendering of the Revised Version, giving a meaning somewhat obscure; whilst the Authorised Version is founded on its omission. The literal rendering according to the *textus receptus* is: "And that I might not through the abundance of the revelations be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet me, that I might not be exalted overmuch."

A few remarks only are requisite on the exegesis of the passage. The affliction, whatever it was, was given by God (ἐδόθη) to the apostle, for so only can the phrase be used, to prevent his being uplifted by the abundance of the revelations imparted to him. The apostle calls this affliction σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί. The word σκόλοψ in classical Greek signifies a sharpened stake, and hence Dean Stanley supposes that the reference is to the punishment of impalement; hence σκολοπιζέειν, to impale. The word, however, is used in the Septuagint to denote a thorn. Thus, of the Canaanites it is said that they should be σκόλοπες ἐν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς to the Israelites (Num. xxxiii. 55). See also Ezek. xxviii. 24, and Hosea ii. 6. And it is probable that this is the meaning of the word when used to represent the infirmity of the apostle, as the other meaning, *stake*, would be an obvious exaggeration. The two datives ἐδόθη μοι σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί are here used, the one to describe the person, and the

other the part of the person affected ;<sup>1</sup> hence : “ There was given a thorn to me to (that is, *in*) my flesh.” The phrase ἄγγελος Σατάν is not to be translated “ the angel Satan,” or “ a hostile angel,” but the messenger or angel of Satan. Satan is represented in Scripture as having angels of his own (Rev. xii. 7). The affliction, although given by God, was yet the angel of Satan. Many outward evils are traceable in Scripture to Satan. He was permitted to afflict Job (Job ii. 6, 7) ; our Lord declares that the woman, whom He cured of a spirit of infirmity of eighteen years’ standing, had been bound by Satan (Luke xiii. 16) ; and St. Paul orders the incestuous member of the Corinthian Church to be delivered over unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved (1 Cor. v. 5). So here Paul’s infirmity is ascribed to Satan.

There are several references in St. Paul’s epistles to his bodily infirmity, which may be considered as directly bearing upon this subject. Thus, in the Epistle to the Galatians, he writes : “ Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh (or rather on account of infirmity of the flesh δι’ ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκὸς) I preached the Gospel unto you at the first ; and my temptation (or as the best MSS. read ‘ your temptation,’ τὸν πειρασμόν ὑμῶν) which was in my flesh, ye despised not nor rejected, but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus” (Gal. iv. 13, 14). Paul’s bodily infirmity detained him in Galatia, and

<sup>1</sup> Winer’s *Grammar of the New Testament*, p. 234.

his first preaching the gospel there was in consequence of this detention. This infirmity was of so humiliating a nature that it was a temptation to the Galatians to despise and reject him, which temptation, however, they overcame. So also in the Epistles to the Corinthians, besides the passage under discussion, there are several other incidental references to this illness, as when the apostle speaks of being with them in weakness (1 Cor. ii. 3); of his bodily presence being weak and his speech contemptible (2 Cor. x. 10); and of his glorying in the things which concern his infirmities (2 Cor. xi. 30).

It would appear that the apostle's bodily infirmities had some connection with the visions and revelations with which he was so highly honoured by God. Strong mental excitement, through the nervous system, affects the body, and often permanently injures the health; and thus "the abundance of the revelations" (*ὑπερβολὴ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων*) may have superinduced some bodily infirmity. There are several examples in Scripture of such effects arising from supernatural visions. Thus Jacob, in consequence of the appearance of God to him at Peniel, halted on his thigh, and became permanently lame (Gen. xxxii. 32). Daniel relates that he fainted, and was sick many days after one of his remarkable visions (Dan. viii. 27). And St. Paul himself is an example; for he was struck with blindness, which lasted for three days, in consequence of the brightness of that light which shone upon him on his way to

Damascus (Acts xx. 9). Hence it is probable that this infirmity, this thorn in the flesh, was also the result of the apostle's supernatural visions. And this probability is increased, when it is recollected that St. Paul alludes to it in connection with the "visions and revelations of the Lord," and especially with a remarkable vision which occurred fourteen years before he wrote this Epistle, and on account of which the thorn in the flesh was given to him (2 Cor. xii. 1-7). In this vision he was caught up to paradise, and such was his mental condition that he could not tell "whether he was in the body or out of the body;" and hence we may well believe that the glories of this revelation permanently affected his bodily health; just as our eyes would be permanently injured were we to gaze for a few moments on the sun.

In the consideration of the particular nature of this infirmity of the apostle, there are several particulars which must be taken into account. (1.) It was a bodily ailment. The apostle calls it "a thorn in the flesh," and in the Epistle to the Galatians he speaks of "the infirmity of the flesh." (2.) It was painful. This is implied in the word *σκόλοψ*: it was sharp as a thorn in the flesh. (3.) It was permanent and intermittent. Paul besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from him, but his request was not granted. It attacked him when he was at Corinth, and again when he preached the Gospel in Galatia. (4.) It was a hindrance to his preaching the Gospel. In Galatia he preached the Gospel through infirmity of the flesh,

and in Corinth he had to struggle against personal weakness. (5.) It was visible and apparent to others. It was not some secret trial, but in some manner outwardly manifest. This is evident from the allusion to it in the Epistle to the Galatians: "Your temptation<sup>1</sup> which was in my flesh ye despised not nor rejected," could only be said of what was visible. (6.) It was humiliating, and apt to make the apostle an object of scorn to others. The Galatians were tempted by it to despise and reject the apostle, and their resistance to that temptation is mentioned to their praise; and his adversaries at Corinth reproached him on account of the weakness of his bodily presence. (7.) Nevertheless, it was the object of his glory. There was something connected with it which gave rise not merely to resignation, but to calm satisfaction on the part of the apostle. "Most gladly," he observes "will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." And this would be the case if his infirmity were connected with the visions and revelations he experienced. All these conditions met in this affliction of the apostle, and therefore any interpretation which does not satisfy these conditions, must be erroneous.

For this reason we may at once set aside several opinions which suppose that the apostle does not allude to any bodily affliction, but to some mental trial. The opinion of many theologians of the Romish Church, that St. Paul refers to the *sensual*

<sup>1</sup> The correct reading of Gal. iv. 14.

*temptations* to which he was exposed, may be indignantly rejected as highly derogatory to the apostle, opposed to the conditions of the problem, and unworthy of examination.<sup>1</sup> Such a temptation could not be given by God, nor be the object of the apostle's glory. We may say with Luther: "Ah no! blessed Paul, it was not such trial which afflicted thee."

The early Reformers, on the other hand, supposed that *spiritual trials* are meant. Thus Calvin interprets τῆ σαρκί metaphorically, and supposes that by it are meant the remainders of depravity in the hearts of the regenerate. "The flesh here," he observes, "denotes not the body, but that part of the soul which has not yet been regenerated. There was given to me a goad that my flesh might be spurred by it, for I am not yet so spiritual as not to be exposed to temptation according to the flesh." So that according to him it is the same struggle which is described by the apostle in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. Luther most characteristically supposes the thorn in the flesh to be spiritual solicitations of Satan, such as blasphemous thoughts, mental struggles, the so called "fiery darts of the devil;" whilst Osiander and Mosheim suppose that it was remorse for his former life. But all these interpretations do not answer any of the conditions of the problem; these trials were not bodily disorders, visible to others,

<sup>1</sup> Such an opinion was adopted by the Venerable Bede, Thomas Aquinas, Bellarmine, Cornelius a Lapide, and other distinguished Romanists.



and humiliating in their nature. The apostle could not glory in such spiritual trials. The thorn in the flesh, whatever it was, was given him by God, and therefore must have been wholly unconnected with personal sin or spiritual imperfection.

It has recently been attempted to show that St. Paul's infirmity must be connected with some defect of character, such as an *infirmity of temper*. This is the opinion advanced by Professor Lias in his Commentary on the Epistles to the Corinthians. A certain irritability of temper, he observes, was the great moral defect of the apostle. He exhibited this in his attack upon the high priest Ananias in the Sanhedrim, in his stern language to Elymas the sorcerer, and in his quarrel with Barnabas. He desired above all things to avoid the necessity of using sharpness, lest his language might exceed the bounds of Christian love. He could not trust himself in his present state of mind to visit Corinth, lest God should humble him before them. Now certainly it is to be admitted, that if any fault is to be found in the character of the great apostle, it was this infirmity of temper ; but it is most unwarrantable to suppose that this was the thorn in the flesh to which he alludes. It does not answer the conditions of the problem at all. It would not be an infirmity in the flesh, it would not be painful, it could not be said to be given him by God, nor would it be an object in which to glory. God would not, in opposition to the earnest prayers of the apostle, have permitted such an infirmity to remain ;

if this were the affliction, certainly his earnest prayers for its removal would have received a gracious answer.

Of no mental or spiritual trial, then, does the apostle speak. It is a *bodily ailment*, ἀσθένεια τῆς σαρκὸς. And this is the uniform meaning given to it by the Fathers, however much they differ as to its particular nature. The first who alludes to it is Irenæus, and he does so in general terms. After quoting the text, he observes: "What! Would the Lord have His apostle so buffeted and to endure such infirmity? Yea, saith the word, for strength is perfected in weakness, rendering him a better man who by means of his infirmity becomes acquainted with the power of God. For how could a man have learned that he is himself an infirm being and mortal by nature, and that God is immortal and powerful, unless he had experience in both?" (Adv. Hær. v. 3, 1). So also Cyprian expresses himself still more indefinitely: "The apostle Paul, after shipwrecks, after scourgings, after many and grievous tortures of the flesh and the body, says that he is not grieved but benefited by his adversity, in order that while he is sorely afflicted he might be more truly proved. 'There was given to me,' he says, 'a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me'" (De mortalitate, 13). But as to the particular nature of this bodily ailment, there is a vast variety of opinion. Almost all the diseases to which man is heir, have been ascribed to the apostle. It may not be uninteresting to notice a few of these opinions which are

commended either by respectable authority or inherent plausibility.

An opinion very common among the Fathers is that St. Paul's thorn in the flesh was *violent headache* (*κεφαλαλγία*). Thus Tertullian, speaking of Paul's being buffeted by Satan, adds, "this was by means of a pain in the ear or the head" (*De Pudic.*, ch. xiii.). And Jerome, in his note on Gal. iv. 13, observes: "The tradition is that he often suffered from a most grievous pain in the head, and that this was the messenger of Satan sent to buffet him." This seems to have been the favourite opinion among the Fathers. The tradition was tolerably general, although its origin cannot be conjectured. Certainly such a bodily infirmity would be a great hindrance to the mental activity of the apostle in preaching the gospel. Still the opinion is only deserving of mention on account of the patristic authority by which it is supported, as being a tradition which comes nearest to the time of the apostle; in other respects it completely fails. It could not have rendered the apostle contemptible; nor, indeed, could have been very visible.

A more plausible opinion is that the thorn in the flesh was a *defect of utterance*.<sup>1</sup> "The view," observes Dr. Doddridge, "that the apostle had of celestial glories, affected his nervous system in such a manner as to occasion some paralytic symptoms, and parti-

<sup>1</sup> This opinion, advanced by Whitby, has been adopted by Macknight, Doddridge, and Eadie.

cularly a stammering in his speech, and perhaps some distortion in his countenance, referred to elsewhere in the phrase of the infirmity in his flesh." It is asserted that there are several allusions which seem to point this way. The apostle speaks of himself as rude in speech (*ἰδιώτης τῷ λόγῳ*, 2 Cor. xi. 6); and it was the reproach of his opponents that his speech was contemptible (*ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος*, 2 Cor. x. 10). Such, it has been observed, must have been a heavy trial to the apostle, as before the attack he was so eloquent as to be mistaken at Lystra for Mercury, the god of eloquence (Acts xiv. 12). And as this might threaten both his acceptance and his usefulness, it is no wonder that he should pray earnestly for its removal; and yet it was the object of his glory, inasmuch as it reminded him of the revelations of the Lord by which it was occasioned. Now, it must be acknowledged that such a hypothesis answers nearly all the conditions. But still it is a mere conjecture, and rests on too few passages to be maintained. *Ἰδιώτης τῷ λόγῳ* does not denote one who is not eloquent as a speaker, but one who has not learned eloquence in the rhetorical schools. The affliction befell the apostle fourteen years before he wrote the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, and therefore several years before he came to Lystra, where the inhabitants mistook him for the god of eloquence, which they could not have done had there been an impediment in his speech. And it cannot be supposed that the man who delivered the speech to the Atheni-

ans and the oration before Agrippa was suffering from defective utterance.

The most common opinion in recent times is that the apostle was afflicted with *ophthalmia* or *disease of the eyes*.<sup>1</sup> It is supposed that the apostle's sight was permanently affected by the appearance of the Lord to him at his conversion, and that the miraculous cure effected by Ananias was incomplete. "The apostle at his conversion," observes Lewin, "had been subjected to the blaze of the heavenly light, and his eyes may ever afterwards have been more or less affected. For a time he was perfectly blind; the scales then fell from his eyes by the touch of Ananias, but a memento of his sinful career still remained. The climate of Damascus is peculiarly injurious to the sight, and almost all the inhabitants suffer more or less from ophthalmia; and as Paul resided there for nearly three years after his conversion, a permanent affection of the vision may have been contracted." And he observes that the term thorn is peculiarly applicable to this ailment. He gives the following quotation from a writer on this disease: "The pain of ophthalmia, when severe, exactly resembles that of a thorn or a pin run into the eyes." This opinion is supported by several supposed allusions to defect in vision. Thus on two occasion it is observed in the Acts of the Apostles that St. Paul looked steadfastly (*ἀτενίσας*), as if his sight were bad—once

<sup>1</sup> This opinion has been maintained by Alford, Lewin, Plumptre, and Farrar.

when he announced the punishment to be inflicted on Elymas the sorcerer (Acts xiii. 9), and another time when he rebuked the High Priest, Ananias (Acts xxiii. 3). And it was probably this defect in vision which prevented him recognising the High Priest. So also, after alluding to the infirmity in his flesh to the Galatians, he adds: "For I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me" (Gal. iv. 15), as if the Galatians were willing, had it been possible, to give their own eyes to the apostle to supply his lack of vision. And his mention of the large letters (*πηλικά γράμματα*) with which he wrote the Epistle to the Galatians (Gal. vi. 11), is supposed to be an allusion to his defective eye-sight. But these are insufficient grounds on which to build an hypothesis. All the passages adduced have no necessary connection with the apostle's weakness of sight. His blindness at his conversion was merely temporary, and was completely cured by the miracle performed by Ananias. *Ἀτενίσας* merely implies a steadfast gaze, and is applied to Stephen (Acts vii. 55) as well as to Paul. The passage in the Epistle to the Galatians is a mere statement of the strong affection of the Galatians for the apostle. And his mode of writing has no necessary connection with his eye-sight.

Another opinion, adopted by authoritative names, is that Paul's thorn in the flesh was *epilepsy* or falling sickness.<sup>1</sup> The reason of its adoption is the closeness

<sup>1</sup> This opinion was adopted by Ziegler, Holsten, and Ewald, and has

of the parallel between such an infirmity and the conditions of the problem. Parallel instances in history are also adduced which illustrate this ailment of the apostle. Bishop Lightfoot especially dwells on the case of King Alfred. The trances and ecstasies of Mahomet, St. Bernard, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Teresa of Spain, George Fox, Jacob Boehme, and Emmanuel Swedenborg have been mentioned as illustrations or analogies. Such an opinion, however, derives no support from any Scriptural intimations; it would also convert the visions and revelations of the apostle into mere natural phenomena, and thus would do away with the supernatural. Several other diseases might be named which would as completely answer the particulars mentioned.

Such are the chief hypotheses or opinions which have been entertained concerning Paul's thorn in the flesh. Those which refer it to some mental infirmity are to be rejected as opposed to the conditions of the problem; whilst those which refer it to some particular bodily infirmity, though more in accordance with the conditions of the question, are conjectures—hypotheses without any certain data to go upon—mere surmises of ingenious scholars. Hence many critics have confessed their ignorance of the ailment.<sup>1</sup> There is no specification in Scripture. The Corinthians required recently been favoured by Bishop Lightfoot. Dr. Schaff also, in his discussion on the subject, gives to it the preference.

<sup>1</sup> So Olshausen, Rückert, Billroth, Neander, De Wette, Meyer, Wordsworth, and Stanley.

no explanation, and, as we have already remarked, their knowledge is the cause of our ignorance.

Nor is this concealment without advantage to us. St. Paul was under no necessity to explain to the Corinthians what was well known to them ; but, in withholding this information, he was guided by a higher Spirit than his own. If the particular infirmity had been mentioned ; if, for example, we had been told that it was, as many suppose, a disease of the sight ; we might have been tempted to restrict the consolation which the subject is so well calculated to afford, and the lessons which it teaches to that particular infirmity. But its indefiniteness imparts to it a manifold application. Every one who is afflicted with any bodily ailment or mental trouble ; every one who is vexed or crossed with any sorrow or annoyance ; every one who has some burden laid upon him—some hindrance in the path of duty—can refer to the case of the apostle ; and be induced to imitate the apostle's example, to appropriate the apostle's consolation, and to be inspired with the apostle's confidence. This trouble, this sickness, this cross, this obstacle, this burden, this annoyance is my thorn in the flesh ; it may be the messenger of Satan to buffet me—to tempt me to sin, or to drag me back from the path of duty ; but it is also given me by God for my good, and, although unremoved, notwithstanding my earnest prayers, yet I, like the apostle, can rely on the promise of my Redeemer : " My grace is sufficient for you ; My strength is perfected in weakness."



We have here an instance of unanswered prayer. The apostle besought the Lord thrice that this thorn in the flesh might be removed. It was not from selfish motives that he made this request, but because he felt that this bodily ailment was a hindrance to his preaching the Gospel, and what he prays for is that that obstacle which prevented the full exercise of his faculties might be taken away, so that he might be enabled to throw himself into the cause of Christ with more bodily strength and more mental vigour, without let or hindrance. Nevertheless his prayers were unanswered; the thorn in the flesh was not removed; the apostle, it is probable, carried it with him to the grave. And it was well for the apostle that his prayer in this instance was unanswered. "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in my flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." To keep him humble, from being spoiled by the exceeding greatness of the revelations communicated to him, this thorn in the flesh was given him by God—this bodily infirmity which continually reminded him of his weakness and dependence on God. "That he might not fall into the devil's sin, God permits him to fall under the devil's scourge" (Bp. Bull). And it had also the effect of preventing his admirers and partisans—the Paul party in Corinth—from exalting him too much. Here was some constitutional weakness, visible to others, which detracted from his

unwearied efforts and great performances, which was apt to make him the object of ridicule to others, so that his opponents and detractors could urge against him that his bodily presence was weak and his speech defective. Not Paul, but Christ must be glorified. Paul shone merely with a borrowed light. And so also the refusal of the apostle's prayer was for the advantage of the Church in general. The Gospel preached through the weakness of the apostle proved itself to be the power of God. "We have," writes the apostle, "this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Cor. iv. 7). "When Paul was weakest as a teacher of the present, he was strongest as the apostle of the future" (Stanley). Paul was no second founder of Christianity, as some who restrict their attention to his almost perfect character, his indefatigable zeal, his missionary successes, and his matchless epistles, appear inclined to imagine. He was the mere instrument of communicating the unsearchable riches of Christ to the world; the earthly vessel, not the treasure itself; not in any sense the master, but the disciple.

But we have not only an instance of unanswered, but an instance of answered prayer. St. Paul's prayer was refused in form, but answered in reality. "And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." We know not how this answer came, whether by vision or internal inspiration, but at all events it was fully

realised in the experience of the apostle ; he felt its reality. The affliction—the hindrance whatever it was, was not removed, but still his prayer was abundantly answered ; grace was conferred upon him ; power not merely to sustain the infirmity, but to rise above it. The burden laid upon him was not taken from him, but it was sustained by the divine arm. And thus the thorn in the flesh, although it seemed to the apostle a hindrance to his preaching the Gospel, yet, in the result, was not so ; Christ's strength was perfected in St. Paul's weakness. He could even glory in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. When he was weak, it was then that he was strong. He had a fund of strength to which he could continually repair. And such also was the case with a far greater than the apostle. Jesus Christ Himself, in that mysterious agony which befell Him in Gethsemane, prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." And yet the cup was not removed ; He had to drain it to the dregs. But that mysterious prayer was answered. "He was heard in that He feared" (Heb. v. 7). "There appeared an angel unto Him from heaven strengthening Him" (Luke xxii. 43). The greatest triumphs of Christianity have been connected with the cross.

Strength perfected in weakness ; this is the law of Christ's spiritual kingdom. Not the removal of the weakness, but the triumph of grace in spite of it. Thus it was with the apostle ; in spite of his consti-

tutional weakness, he was the greatest and most successful missionary the world ever saw. "I can," says he, "do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." There was no limit to his actions, when labouring in the strength of Christ. And thus it should also be with us. Weak in ourselves, we should be strong in Christ. To Him we should repair and draw out of His infinite fulness even grace for grace. We should follow on to know the Lord, never forgetting our dependence on Him or overlooking the necessity of His grace.

## EXPOSITION X.

### DUALITY OF MEDIATION AND UNITY OF GOD.

GALATIANS iii. 20.

*Textus receptus.*—'Ο δὲ μεσίτης ἑνὸς οὐκ ἔστιν· ὁ δὲ Θεὸς εἷς ἔστιν.

*Authorised Version.*—Now a mediator is not *a mediator* of one, but God is one.

*Revised Version.*—Now a mediator is not *a mediator* of one; but God is one.

THIS verse, if we are to judge from the number of explanations which have been given of it, is the most obscure in Scripture. Winer states this number at 250; a number which Professor Jowett, in his commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, on what authority we know not, has augmented to 430. A list of interpretations has been given in the various monographs on this verse, and Meyer in his valuable commentary states and discusses the merits of no less than eighteen. The reason of this obscurity arises partly from the elliptic brevity of the language, which requires something to be supplied; partly from a mistaken application of the term *mediator*; and partly from a want of a clear perception of the

apostle's argument. The words, taken by themselves, are simple enough ; they contain the enunciation of two self-evident propositions—*the duality of mediation*: “Now a mediator is not a mediator of one,” and *the unity of God*: “But God is one ;” but the difficulty arises in connecting these two propositions with the preceding or succeeding statements, and interweaving them with the apostle's argument. This vast number of explanations may be greatly reduced by rejecting all those which are extravagant or unintelligible, and which so far from explaining increase the difficulty ; all those which apply the word *μεσίτης* directly to Christ, it being evident that, the apostle speaks not of Christ, but of Moses as the mediator ; all those which give different meanings to the numerical term *εἰς* in the two clauses ; and all those which are at variance with the context, either with that which precedes or with that which follows.

There is no difference in the reading of the text. All uncial and cursive manuscripts contain the same words in the same order. Hence we cannot adopt that violent method of solving the difficulty, which Lücke employs, who supposes that the words were originally a gloss, written on the margin by some annotator explaining the term *μεσίτης*, and which has found its way into the text.

So also the meaning of the separate words is so evident, that there exists hardly any difference of opinion regarding the translation. *Δὲ* is transition-

ary: *Now*. 'Ο μεσίτης denotes the idea of a mediator, and is to be taken generically ; and hence is not to be translated "the mediator," or "this mediator," referring to Moses, but *a mediator*. 'Ενὸς οὐκ ἔστιν denotes that a mediator does not imply only one person, but necessarily supposes two, between whom he intervenes ; hence the words are correctly rendered *is not a mediator of one*. The second clause ὁ δὲ Θεὸς εἷς ἔστιν expresses a contrast to this idea of a mediator : *but God is one*. The words exactly rendered are, "Now a mediator of one is not ; but God is one."

In order to obtain a true meaning of the passage we must carefully observe the context, and endeavour to trace the apostle's line of argument. The words are contained in a paragraph, wherein the apostle discusses the blessings or promises conferred on Abraham ; and which, as they were given before the promulgation of the law, he considers were conferred on the spiritual seed of Abraham, which, centering in Christ, included believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews ; in short, these blessings or promises were nothing else than an annunciation or prefiguration of the Gospel. "The Scripture," foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, 'In thee shall all nations be blessed'" (Gal. iii. 8). Long after this the law intervened, but it did not abrogate or supersede the promise ; it was given for a special purpose, and is not to be regarded as an addition to the covenant made with Abraham. Even human cove-

nants, if properly ratified and sanctioned, are not legally made void, except by the consent of both parties ; nothing can be taken from them or added to them ; and much more is this the case with the covenants of the unchanging God, whose promises cannot fail and whose word cannot prove abortive. “Brethren, I speak after the manner of men ; though it be but a man’s covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth or addeth thereto.” The promise was made to Abraham and to his seed, namely to Christ, and to all who are in union with Him—who constitute His mystical body ; it was made long before the law ; it was not a matter of law or contract at all, but of promise—the free gift of God. “And this I say, that the covenant which was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise”—namely, the promise of blessings made to Abraham and to his seed—“of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law,” if it depended on the condition of its observance, “it is no more of promise ; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.”

But now the question arises, if the law is unconnected with the promise made to Abraham, what is its use ? *Τί οὖν ὁ νόμος ;* “What then is the law ?” For what purpose was it given ? The apostle answers, “It was added because of transgression ;” *τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν*, literally “for the sake of transgressions.” Different meanings have been attached to these words. Some suppose the law was given in order to restrain



transgression, to be a check and hindrance to sin. Others think the meaning is that the law was added for the punishment of transgressions; to reveal the wrath of God, and thus to quicken the moral sense. Others suppose the meaning to be that the law was given in order to multiply transgression; "The law entered that sin might abound" (Rom. v. 20). But the meaning here seems to be that the law was added to excite in man the consciousness of transgression—to convince of sin, and so to make him feel his need of redemption.<sup>1</sup> The apostle is here treating of the law as a preparation for the Gospel, as an educator to teach us the necessity of a Saviour, and to excite us to repair to that Saviour: "The law was our school-master to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. iii. 24). And this use of the law in giving rise to a sense of sin is repeatedly insisted upon by St. Paul; without the law there can be no true sense of sin: "I had not known sin, but by the law." "By the law is the knowledge of sin." "Where no law is, there is no transgression." Thus, then, the use of the law was transitional, to convince of sin and to lead to the Saviour: "Till the seed should come unto whom the promise was made," *ἄχρισ οὖ ἔλθη τὸ σπέρμα ᾧ ἐπήγγελται*. The apostle further adds, as another speciality of the law in distinction from the

<sup>1</sup> "The law was published in order to make known transgressions, and in this way to compel men to acknowledge their guilt. As men naturally are too ready to excuse themselves, so, until they are roused by the law, their consciences are asleep."—CALVIN.

promise, that it was "ordained by angels" (*διαταγείς δι' ἀγγέλων*). The meaning of these words is, that the instrumentality of angels was employed in the promulgation of the law from Mount Sinai. This fact is indeed not clearly stated in the account which we have of the giving of the law in the book of Exodus, but there is an apparent reference to it in the book of Deuteronomy, where Moses in his song says: "The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; He shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from His right hand went a fiery law for them" (Deut. xxxiii. 2). In the Septuagint, which St. Paul as a Hellenistic Jew was in the custom of using, the words are, *ἐκ δεξιῶν αὐτοῦ ἄγγελοι μετ' αὐτοῦ*, "His angels were with Him on His right hand." So also the Psalmist, referring to the giving of the law, says: "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place" (Psalm lxxviii. 17). In the New Testament this instrumentality of the angels in the giving of the law is several times adverted to. St. Stephen, in his address to the Sanhedrim, says, "Who have received the law by the disposition of angels" (Acts vii. 53); and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, asserting the superior glory of the Gospel, observes that the Gospel was directly communicated by the Son, and the law was indirectly communicated by angels, "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast" (Heb. ii. 2). It was also a Jewish tradition that angels were employed in

the giving of the law ; thus Josephus says, " For ourselves we have learned from God the most excellent of our doctrines, and the most holy part of the law by angels." It is, however, to be observed, that the angels were not the authors of the law, but the ministering servants employed in the giving of the law. The only author of the law is God ; it contains His commandments and not the commandments of any creatures, however exalted ; but in the promulgation of the law, for wise purposes, He was pleased to employ the angels as His ministers.

As another distinction between the law and the promise, and that to which our passage specially refers, the apostle adds that the law was given " in the hand of a mediator," *ἐν χειρὶ μεσίτου*. The expression *ἐν χειρὶ* is a Hebraism, denoting instrumentality, so that the words may be rendered " through a mediator." A mediator denotes one who intervenes or comes between two parties at variance ; it generally denotes an arbitrator or reconciler, but the idea of arbitration or reconciliation is not essential to it, and in the case under consideration is wanting. The Fathers in general considered that the Mediator here alluded to was Christ, because to Him pre-eminently does this title belong. Others suppose that it was the angel of the covenant, to whom the Jews gave the name Metatron. But it is evident from the whole context, and from the train of the apostle's argument, that the Mediator here alluded to was Moses. He it was who intervened between the two parties—God and

the Israelites; he received the law from God and communicated it to the people. Hence the Israelites said unto Moses: "Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Exod. xx. 19). And Moses, in his address to them, says: "I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to show you the word of the Lord: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount" (Deut. v. 5). Thus Moses was the mediator of the legal covenant, but he was not a reconciler; he was merely the medium of communication between God and the Israelites; the law given to Moses through the instrumentality of angels was received by the Israelites through the instrumentality of Moses. Among Jewish and rabbinical writers the name mediator is frequently applied to Moses. He is so designated by Philo: "Moses, being amazed and constrained by this command, believes these inscrutable events, and rose up to be a mediator."

And now follow the words which form the subject of exposition: "Now a mediator is not a *mediator* of one; but God is one." The apostle dwells upon the last distinction between the law and the promise which he had mentioned—that the law was given through a mediator; and he takes up the word mediator, and further explains this distinction. The words are not to be understood as a definition or explanation of the term mediator, for that is obvious and would be unimportant, but are to be considered as a continuation of the apostle's argument. There

are here expressed two antitheses—(1) A mediator (ὁ μεσίτης), and God (ὁ Θεός); (2) Not of one (ἐνὸς οὐκ), and one (εἷς). “A mediator is not of one,” evidently includes a duality, necessarily supposes two parties between whom he mediates. On the contrary (δὲ) “God is one,” and therefore without a mediator. This is the evident meaning of the words; and, taken in connection with what goes before, we do not think it impossible to discover their application. The law was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator; but a mediator is not a mediator of one person, but of two—here, in the case under consideration, the mediator was Moses, and the two parties between whom he stood were God and the Israelites. But God is not a mediator between two parties: He is one; in His promise God acts alone and independently—here, in the case under consideration, in the giving of the promise to Abraham by God, there was no mediator, it was absolute and unconditional, without the intervention of a third person. The covenant which God made with the Israelites at Sinai was given through a mediator—namely, Moses; but the covenant which God made with Abraham, that in him and in his seed all nations of the earth should be blessed, was given directly without a mediator. The one was conditional, and by law or contract; the other was unconditional, and by promise. St. Paul expresses this thought not directly but indirectly, in order to give point to his observation. Thus by attending to the connection, and following the line of the apostle’s

argument—the distinction which he draws between the promise made by God to Abraham, and the law given to the Israelites through Moses—we are enabled to attain to a reasonable meaning of the text.

The words then are to be considered as a part of the apostle's argument on the relation of the promise made to Abraham to the law. He magnifies the promise at the expense of the law. According to his view, the promise made to Abraham was the same as the Gospel, the message of eternal life ; the law was the ground of condemnation, and by convincing of transgression, might lead to the reception of the Gospel. In this passage four distinct points of subordination of the law to the promises are mentioned. 1. The law was restricted and conditional ; it "was added because of transgression," in order to excite the consciousness of sin. The promise, on the contrary, was absolute and unconditional. 2. The law was temporary and provisional ; it was given "until the seed should come to whom the promise was made." The promise was permanent and eternal. 3. The law was communicated indirectly : "it was ordained by angels"—promulgated through their instrumentality. The promise was directly given by God. The same point of distinction is dwelt upon by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, when he says : "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward ; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ;

which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him?" (Heb. ii. 2, 3). 4. The law was received from God through a mediator. The promise was received by Abraham directly from God without any intervention. The apostle, leaving the three first points of contrast, dwells more particularly upon the fourth point, as in his view the most important. Now a mediator (generally considered) is not a mediator of one, but God is one. In the law, there is a duality; in the promise, there is a unity. The law was *with*, the promise was *without* a mediator. Hence, then, our text may be considered as an imperfect syllogism, in which the conclusion has to be supplied. Now a mediator, through whom the law was received, does not pertain to one, but necessarily presupposes two; but God, the giver of the promise, is one; therefore in the promise the idea of a mediator is excluded.

The meaning which we have assigned to the text, depends on the supposition that St. Paul is maintaining the subordination of the law to the promise made to Abraham. This, however, has been called in question by many eminent critics. They assert that such a subordination is not to be found in the apostle's discourse; that, so far from depreciating, he seeks to glorify the law. The consideration that the law was ordained by angels serves for its glorification, inasmuch as angels are mentioned along with God for the purpose of manifesting His glory, as when it is said, that Christ shall come with His holy angels. Nor is

there anything disparaging in the statement that the law was received through a mediator, inasmuch as in the Gospel itself there is a Mediator, namely the Lord Jesus Christ ; so that here there is no distinction between the law and the Gospel. And the subordination of the law to the promise lies outside of the apostle's argument. But to these arguments, it has been justly replied : It is true that when angels are joined simply with God or Christ they are added with a view to glorification ; but when the discourse is of God simply as one (*ὁ δὲ Θεὸς εἰς ἑστίν*) and of His revelations to His creatures, it is evident that a revelation given directly by God is superior to a revelation given indirectly by means of angels, as, indeed, is insisted upon by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The mediator here alluded to is not the mediator of the new covenant, the eternal Son of God, but the mediator of the law, Moses a human being ; and since there is here a direct antithesis between a mediator (*ὁ μεσίτης*) and God (*ὁ Θεὸς*), *ἐν χειρὶ μεσίτου* must point to some mark of inferiority as compared with the promise, which is directly given by God. And with regard to the assertion that the subordination of the law to the promise is not within the scope of the apostle's argument, this is the very question in debate, and is, we consider, amply refuted by an attentive consideration of the whole paragraph. The next verse indicates that the apostle had been so depreciating the law as to give rise to the idea that there was not only a subordination, but an actual



opposition between the law and the promise: "Is the law then against the promises of God?"

Such we consider to be the correct interpretation of this obscure passage; the apostle is showing the subordination of the law to the promise; and one of the points of subordination which he mentions is that the law was given through a mediator, but the promise was given without a mediator.<sup>1</sup> Thus Schleiermacher observes: "The mediator of an agreement does not exist when there is only one person but always pre-supposes two persons; these were God and the Jewish nation. But God is one with reference to His promises; that is, God therein acts quite freely unconditionally, independently, and for Himself alone, as one numerically, because it is no agreement between two, but His free gift." So also Conybeare thus paraphrases the verse: "The law was enacted by the ministration of angels through the hand of Moses, who was a mediator between God and the people. Now where a mediator is, there must be two parties. But God is one, and there is no second party to His promise." And Bishop Ellicott gives the following interpretation: "Now a mediator does not appertain to one, standing or acting alone; but in the promise God is one, does stand and act alone; therefore in the promise a mediator does not appertain to God. Is then the law a dispensation, which, beside other distinctions, involved a mediator, opposed to the

<sup>1</sup> This opinion is substantially adopted by Schleiermacher, Usteri, Conybeare, Ellicott, and Lightfoot.

promise which rested on God, and involved no mediator? God forbid!"

The obvious objection to this explanation is that the Gospel, equally with the law, involves a mediator; as Moses is the mediator of the law or old covenant, so Christ is the Mediator of the Gospel or better covenant. "There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. ii. 5). Moses intervened between God and the Israelities; and Christ intervenes between God and sinners. But to this it is answered that the apostle is not discoursing directly on the Gospel, but on the promises made to Abraham, and these promises were made directly by God without the intervention of a mediator. It is true that these promises were to all intents and purposes the same as the Gospel, and hence the apostle says that, "God preached before the Gospel unto Abraham" (Gal. iii. 8); but yet this is not prominently brought forward. Besides, the mediator of the Gospel is different from the mediator of the law; the word is used in a different sense. Jesus Christ is, as Mediator, the Reconciler between God and sinners; He is "the Surety of the better covenant;" He has destroyed the duality which exists in the case of two parties at variance, and made them one in Himself. On the other hand, Moses, as the mediator of the law, is in no sense a reconciler, but merely a medium of communication between God and the Israelites, who receives the law from God and communicates it to the Israelites. And, as has been well remarked, we must

“remember St. Paul’s habit of insulating the matter in hand, and dealing with it irrespective of all possible objections.”

Before concluding this exposition, we would advert to four other explanations of our text which are remarkable either from their plausibility or from the authorities by whom they are supported. We shall merely mention them without entering upon their merits.

1. One interpretation is that which supposes that the reference is to the right and title of the Gentiles to the promises made by God to Abraham and his seed. In the covenant made with Abraham the believing Gentiles were included as well as the believing Jews ; both constituted His spiritual seed which is represented in Christ. Here the two parties are God on the one hand, and Abraham and his seed, including all that believe, both Jews and Gentiles, on the other. But when the law was given Moses stood only between God and the Israelites, and did not stand between God and the whole collective seed of Abraham. Consequently nothing which Moses did could disannul the promise made by God to Abraham, in which the Gentiles were concerned as well as the Israelites ; for no covenant can be altered except by the mutual consent of both parties. In what was done at Mount Sinai by the mediation of Moses, there was no one to appear for the Gentiles ; so that this transaction between God and the Israelites did not abrogate or disannul the covenant made between God and the spiritual seed of Abraham.

In conformity with this interpretation the following meaning is given to the words: Now a mediator is not a mediator of one party, but of two parties; but God is one of the parties, and the other is not only the Jews but also the Gentiles, for whom Moses did not intervene.<sup>1</sup> This view is thus stated by Locke: "God is but one of the parties concerned in the promise; the Gentiles and Israelites together make up the other. But Moses, at the giving of the law, was a mediator only between the Israelites and God; and therefore could not transact anything to the disannulling of the promise, which was between God and the Israelites and the Gentiles together, because God was but one of the parties of the covenant; the other, which was the Gentiles as well as the Israelites, Moses intervened or transacted not for." Calvin also supposes that the reference here is to the Jews and Gentiles, although he gives a different interpretation.

2. A second explanation given is that we have here a statement of the parties between whom the mediator intervenes. The following meaning is given to the words: A mediator is not a mediator of one—the idea of mediation necessarily supposes two parties; but God is one, that is one of the parties. This gives a very simple meaning to the words; but it is merely the statement of an obvious fact; and so far as it appears without any doctrinal or practical application. Winer draws the inference that

<sup>1</sup> This opinion has been adopted by Locke, Michaelis, Whitby, and Doddridge.

as God will certainly perform His part of the covenant, so the other party is bound to perform his part. The two parties in the giving of the law are God and the Israelites ; but as the law was given not with reference to the Israelites alone, but with reference to the whole human race, the two parties may be considered to be God and man. If man does not obey the law of God, he violates the conditions of the covenant and forfeits the blessings which it confers. Olshausen gives a somewhat similar explanation, but he supposes that the design of the apostle is to magnify the Gospel above the law ; and that therefore from this statement an inference is to be drawn which the apostle has suppressed, but which directly and obviously flows from it. Taking  $\acute{\omicron} \delta\grave{\epsilon} \Theta\epsilon\acute{\omicron}\varsigma \epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\iota\nu$  as denoting God is one, and consequently only one party, he gives the following explanation of the words : "Mediation presupposes a state of separation, and there can be no mediator in the case of one ; since God is the one party, there must also be a second, namely men who were separated from God. In the Gospel, it is otherwise ; in Christ, the representative of the Church, all are one ; all separations and distinctions are done away in Him."

3. The third interpretation is that of Dean Alford. It is somewhat obscure, and not easily stated in intelligible language. According to Alford, the clause is to be connected rather with what follows, "Is the law then against the promises of God?" than with what precedes. He supposes that the

words ὁ Θεὸς εἰς ἔστιν represent not merely the numerical unity of God, but “unity as an essential attribute, extending through the whole of the divine character.” Now, the idea of μεσίτης is opposed to this unity, belongs to a state οὐχ εἰς; there is variance between two, namely God and the sinner; and consequently is apparently opposed to the promises belonging to ὁ εἰς, the one (faithful) God. The law being thus set over against the promises—being given through a mediator between two—belonging to the state οὐχ εἰς; the promises being given by the one God—belonging to the state εἰς—it might seem as if there were an opposition between them. “Is then the law against the promises of God?” An inference which the apostle rejects with horror. “God forbid.” It could only be so, provided the law performed the same office with the promises; that is, provided it could justify the sinner; whereas its office is directly the reverse, to give rise to the consciousness of sin, and thus to lead to condemnation: “For if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.”

4. According to a fourth interpretation the apostle alludes to the unity which is in Christ—all are one in Christ. The law creates disunion; it is given by a mediator; but a mediator is not a mediator of one; it presupposes two parties at variance. Hence the

law worketh wrath—it creates a breach between God and man; it is the cause of separation. The promise, or the Gospel, on the contrary, creates union; God is one; He is reconciling all things to Himself; the variance occasioned by the law is removed; and thus a union is established between God and man. All are united in Christ, who is the seed to whom the promises were made. And hence the apostle concludes his argument in these words: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. iii. 28, 29). According to this view, the words are to be paraphrased as follows: Now a mediator is not a mediator of one—it supposes two parties at variance; namely, God and man; but God is one; in the promise, that is, in the Gospel, God and man are reconciled—are one in Christ. Not only by His atonement, but in His own incomprehensible person, He has united God and man. In the law there is the duality of mediation—disunion between God and man; in the promise there is the unity of God—union between God and man.

## EXPOSITION XI.

### THE COMPLEMENT OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS.

#### COLOSSIANS i. 24.

*Textus receptus.*—Νῦν χαίρω ἐν τοῖς παθήμασί μου ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, καὶ ἀνταναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, ὃ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐκκλησία.

*Authorised Version.*—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.

*Revised Version.*—Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church.

THE context of this passage does not throw much light upon its meaning, inasmuch as the words are a parenthesis which might be omitted without any injury to the general sense. In the preceding paragraph St. Paul had been adverting to the glory of the Gospel dispensation, arising from the supreme dignity of its Author, the unspeakable blessings which it confers, and the universal reconciliation which it effects. Of this glorious Gospel he was privileged to be a minister, an announcer of the glad tidings of



reconciliation, "Whereof I, Paul, am made a minister." Here the apostle breaks off his discourse to interject a brief thanksgiving to God that he was permitted to suffer for Christ's sake, since by his sufferings "he fills up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ for His body's sake, which is the Church." Having thus given vent to the personal emotion excited within him, he, as his manner was, returns to the point at which he had broken off, and takes up the thread of his discourse by repeating its last phrase, "Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the Word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations, but now is made manifest to His saints."

The word *who* (*ὅς*) in our Authorised Version is but weakly attested, and is not even inserted in the *textus receptus*; it is, however, defended by Meyer, but rejected by Tischendorf, Lachmann, and Alford. The pronoun *my* (*μου*) before sufferings is wanting in all the uncial MSS., and is very feebly attested. With these exceptions the words of our text are fully supported.

The exegesis of the passage is as follows. *νῦν*, *now*, not a particle of connection or transition, but of time, as is evident from its position in the original, and from the parenthetical nature of the verse; *now*, at this present time, in contrast with the past, before he was made a minister. Either *now*, whilst reflecting on the glorious Gospel which I am privileged to

announce, or rather, *now*, although a prisoner at Rome and in chains,—although suffering for the cause of the Gospel. *Χαίρω*, *I rejoice*; in the midst of my sufferings I now rejoice. This union of joy with suffering often occurs with this apostle: “We glory in tribulation.” *ἐν τοῖς παθήμασι*, *in sufferings*. The apostle’s sufferings were not merely the sphere of his joy, “joy in the midst of sufferings,” but the cause or occasion of his joy, “joy on account of sufferings.” *ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν*, *for you*; not “instead of you,” or “in room of you,”—there is here no reference to the idea of substitution,—nor yet “on your account,” but “on your behalf,” or, as the Revised Version has it, “for your sake.” *καὶ*, *and*; the simple copulative “and through them I fill up.” *ἀνταναπληρῶ*, *I fill up*. This double compound verb is only found here in the New Testament; the simple compound *ἀναπληρῶ* is used elsewhere (1 Cor. xvi. 17; Phil. ii. 30). The force of *ἄντι* is not that Paul “in his turn” fills up; that is, “as Christ suffered for me, so I suffer for Christ;” but it signifies to fill up in way of supplement. The complement corresponds to that which is lacking (Meyer); hence it may be rendered “supplement,” or rather “complete.” *τὰ ὑστερήματα*, *that which is behind*; indicating what was yet wanting in the afflictions of Christ to fill them up, or render them complete. The word denotes “those things which are wanting or lacking.” The nearest approach to it is “deficiencies,” though without the implication that there was any positive defect in the afflictions of Christ. Our Authorised

Version is not inappropriate, "that which is behind." τῶν θλίψεων, *of the afflictions*. A different word from that rendered *sufferings* (παθήμασι) in the former clause; it does not denote the vicarious sufferings of Christ, but His afflictions. τοῦ Χριστοῦ, *of Christ*; not the afflictions of which Christ was the cause, but of which He is the subject; His afflictions, the afflictions which He endures. ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ μου, *in my flesh*; belonging to the verb "fill up," namely, fill up or complete in my flesh. Paul's sufferings in his flesh supplemented or completed what was lacking in Christ's affliction. ὑπὲρ, *for the sake of*, "on behalf of." τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, *His body*; there being here an antithesis of the apostle's flesh (σαρκί) and Christ's body (σώματος). ὃ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐκκλησία, *which is the Church*, an explanation of what is meant by the body of Christ.

The passage literally translated is as follows: "Now I rejoice in sufferings for your sake, and fill up in my flesh that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ for the sake of His body, that is, the Church." The passage is correctly rendered in Luther's version: "Nun freue ich mich in meinem Leiden, das ich für euch leide, und erstatte an meinem Fleisch, was noch mangelt an Trübsalen in Christo, für seinen Leib, welcher ist die Gemeine."

This being the exegesis of the passage, several interpretations may at once be dismissed as inadmissible. All those, for instance, which give a substitutionary meaning to the preposition *for*, as if St.

Paul's sufferings were vicarious like those of Christ, a meaning unsupported by this passage, and in evident contradiction to the general scope of Pauline doctrine. So also we may dismiss all those meanings which regard the afflictions of Christ as those of which He is the cause: such as "afflictions which Christ sends," "afflictions of which Christ is the author." The genitive is not the genitive of agency, but of possession. We may also omit those meanings which give a metaphorical or figurative interpretation to the afflictions of Christ; such as "afflictions for the sake of Christ." The sufferings of the apostle were certainly for Christ's sake; but they are not so designated in this passage. The afflictions of Christ are the afflictions endured by Christ.

Having thus dismissed without examination what we consider inadmissible interpretations, we now proceed to consider four of the most plausible meanings which have been attached to the words.

I. Some understand by what is lacking in Christ's afflictions deficiencies in those sufferings which He endured for the reconciliation of His people. They suppose that there was a certain deficiency in the sufferings to which Christ submitted in order to reconcile the world to God, which deficiency had to be completed, or filled up, or supplemented, by the sufferings of St. Paul and of other followers of Christ. A distinction is made between sufferings for the sake of atonement, and sufferings for the sake of reconciliation. The former refer to original sin, and are

complete and infinitely sufficient ; the latter refer to actual sins, and have to be supplemented by the sufferings of all who take up the cross for Christ's sake. The great argument for this view is that it gives a true and natural meaning to the passage, and that it is supported by the context, wherein the apostle is discoursing on the blessings of reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. This, or something like this, is the meaning which the Romanists adopt, and which is supported by the majority of their divines. And it is chiefly on the above interpretation of this verse that they maintain their doctrine of indulgences, works of supererogation, and the transferable merits of the saints—doctrines which, according to our Protestant notions, have given rise to the grossest abuses in the Christian Church. They assume that St. Paul's sufferings, and the sufferings of other saints, were meritorious, and that in this sense St. Paul, by his sufferings filled up the deficiencies in the afflictions of Christ.

Such a view we consider not only as totally unsupported by this text, but as in direct variance with the views of St. Paul and the undoubted sense of Scripture. It involves the idea of substitution. But, as we have already seen, the words, strictly interpreted, do not admit of this idea. St. Paul suffered not in the room, but for the sake of, the Church. It may, indeed, be asserted, that substitution is contained in the notion of atonement, but not in the notion of reconciliation ; but, in reality, there is no essential

difference between these two ideas ; the atonement is the cause of the reconciliation. The distinction is not a Scriptural one, but is introduced for a purpose. It is also to be observed that the apostle does not speak of the sufferings, but of the afflictions (*θλιψαίς*) of Christ ; he employs a word which, in itself, does not necessarily imply the idea of meritorious suffering, but rather seems to exclude it. And certainly the above view is directly opposed to Paulinism. Nothing can be more alien to the theology of St. Paul than the assumption that there is any deficiency in the expiatory sufferings of Christ. And, indeed, the whole of Scripture is opposed to this view of the subject. The sufferings of Christ, as an atonement for sin, and as the cause of reconciliation, are always represented as perfect. The sacrifice, which He offered on Calvary, is of infinite efficacy. "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth from all sin." Whatever be the meaning of this difficult passage, it cannot possibly imply any defect or incompleteness in the expiatory sufferings of Christ, which needs to be supplemented by the efforts or endurance of weak and sinful men. Even several Roman Catholic divines oppose the above interpretation : "As if," observes Estius, "Christ had not suffered enough for redemption, and, therefore, needed a supplemental satisfaction of martyrs." And he remarks that the doctrine of the satisfaction of the saints "cannot be solidly concluded from this passage."

II. Others consider the afflictions of Christ, which have to be filled up, not as His expiatory sufferings, but as sufferings endured for the building up of His Church, and for the confirmation of believers. According to this opinion, the sufferings of Christ are regarded from two points of view, sufferings for the sake of satisfaction (*satisfactoriæ*), and sufferings for the sake of edification (*œdificatoriæ*): they have their sacrificial efficacy, and they have their ministerial utility. Considered sacrificially, the sufferings of Christ are perfect: He has offered, once for all, a complete atonement for the sins of the world. But considered ministerially, the sufferings of Christ are incomplete; "they are supplemented by the afflictions of the faithful." The phrase, "the afflictions of Christ," is here employed in its true and natural sense,—the affliction which He Himself endured. This is the view advanced by Bishop Lightfoot in his unrivalled Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians. "It is," he observes, "a simple matter of fact that the afflictions of every saint and martyr do supplement the afflictions of Christ. The Church is built up by repeated acts of self-denial in successive individuals and successive generations. They continue the work which Christ began. They bear their part in the sufferings of Christ; but St. Paul would have been the last to say that they bear their part in the atoning sacrifice of Christ."

Notwithstanding the high authority by which this view has been advanced, the ingenuity by which it

has been supported, and the natural sense which it gives to the phrase, "the afflictions of Christ," we must regard it as hazy and far fetched. No such distinction of the sufferings of Christ as those for satisfaction and those for edification, is to be found in Scripture, nor is there any ground for affirming that the one is complete and the other incomplete. Although the sufferings of Christ are an example for our imitation, viewed as an instance of self-sacrifice, and the sufferings of the saints are for the edification of the Church, considered as examples of faith and patience; yet it would afford but a doubtful and mystical meaning to affirm that the afflictions of believers complete the afflictions of Christ in the building up of His Church. Such a meaning does not lie on the surface, and would not suggest itself to the first readers of the Epistle. With the profoundest respect for the great commentator who has advanced it, we are nevertheless compelled to dismiss it as obscure, unsatisfactory, and fanciful.

III. A third and more plausible interpretation is that which takes St. Paul's sufferings as similar and almost coincident with Christ's afflictions. The sufferings of St. Paul were in an important sense the sufferings of Christ. He drank of the same bitter cup, and was baptised with the same baptism. He trod the same path of sorrow. And more especially those sufferings which he endured for the sake of the Gospel were the afflictions of Christ. Take Christ away, and his sufferings would cease; he would no



longer suffer persecution. Thus, then, in his flesh, in his own person, he filled up that which was behind in the afflictions of Christ. He endured sufferings like those of his Lord, endured them for the sake of the Church. He was filling up the measure of his sufferings, and supplementing wherein these came short of the afflictions of Christ.

This is the view advanced by Meyer, perhaps the greatest of modern exegetes. "Paul," he observes, "describes his own sufferings as *afflictions of Christ*, in so far as the apostolic suffering in essential character was the same as Christ endured. The collective mass of these afflictions is conceived in the form of a definite *measure*. He only who has suffered *all*, has *filled up* that measure." And he gives the following interpretation of the passage: "I rejoice on account of the sufferings which I endure for you, and am in the course of furnishing the complete fulfilment of what in my case still remains in arrear of fellowship of affliction with Christ." It is observed that he does not understand the expression τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ to mean any deficiencies in the sufferings of Christ Himself, but in his (the apostle's) own sufferings; that which he has endured still fell short of Christ's afflictions, and this deficiency he was now by his sufferings in the course of filling up in his flesh. "Every explanation," he observes, "which involves the idea of the suffering endured by Christ in the days of His flesh having been incomplete or needing supplement, is an anomaly which offends

against the analogy of faith of the New Testament."<sup>1</sup>

There are numerous passages in Scripture which seem to confirm this view. Thus St. Paul expresses his desire to "know Christ, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death." And again, he says: "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolations also abound by Christ." "If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him" (Phil. iii. 10; 2 Cor. i. 5; 2 Tim. ii. 12). And St. Peter calls upon his converts to rejoice, inasmuch as they were "partakers of Christ's sufferings" (1 Pet. iv. 13). There is therefore a similarity almost amounting to identity between the sufferings of Christ and the sufferings of believers. When a man endures any loss, or pain, or persecution, for righteousness' sake, which he might have escaped but for his devotion to Christ, he is a partaker of Christ's sufferings, a fellow-traveller with Him along that path of sorrow which leads to glory. There is certainly a great difference in point of measure or quantity between Christ's sufferings and his, but he is by his sufferings filling up the deficiency, and this not for his own discipline in righteousness alone, but also for the edification of his fellow-believers,—“for His body's sake, which is the Church.”

Now, it must be admitted that this interpre-

<sup>1</sup> Similar views have been adopted by Schleiermacher, Huther, Winer, and other distinguished German theologians.

tation, as it is so ingeniously explained by Meyer, gives a good sense to our passage, and has much to recommend it. The apostle is filling up in his own case the deficiencies in his own sufferings by which they came behind the sufferings of Christ. The difficulty in the way of our accepting this view is that there appears to be a want of simplicity about it; it is not the meaning which lies on the surface of the passage. The words "the deficiencies (*τὰ ὑστερήματα*) of the afflictions of Christ," seem to imply some deficiency in the afflictions of Christ Himself, whereas, according to Meyer, they are a deficiency in the sufferings of the apostle, whereby "they remained in arrear of the fellowship of affliction with Christ." And hence we are disposed, though not without considerable hesitation, to reject this opinion as not sufficiently natural and exhaustive.

4. A fourth view is that which considers the afflictions of Christ as His afflictions in His body, the Church. According to this view, the afflictions of Christ are not those which He personally endured while He was on earth, but those which He now mystically endures in heaven, a view which is supported, if not justified, by the explanatory words, "for His body's sake, which is the Church." These words are held to afford the key of the whole passage. Christ's body, the Church, has its complement of suffering to endure; and St. Paul, as a member of that body, by his sufferings, filled up

his part, which was wanting in the way of completion, though not in the way of substitution.

Christ, who once suffered in His own person, still suffers in His Church. There is a mystical union between Him and His people, a principle of identity. The Church is His body, and if one member of the body suffers, all the members suffer with it. Thus our Lord, when He encountered Paul on His way to Damascus, accused him of persecuting, not His Church, but Himself: "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." There is a living sympathy between Christ and His people. "In all their afflictions, He was afflicted." And these sufferings of Christ's body have to be filled up; every member of that body has a certain measure of suffering allotted to him, and must do his part in the common work. The sufferings of the whole Church, from its birth down to the end of time, is the measure which requires to be filled up; and each believer adds his *quotum*, until at length, when the measure is filled up, Christ's body, as He Himself, will be received into glory everlasting.

This is the view adopted by many of our most distinguished commentators and Biblical critics.<sup>1</sup> "Christ," says St. Augustine, "is still suffering affliction; not in *His* very flesh, in which He has

<sup>1</sup> As Chrysostom and Augustine among the Fathers; Calvin, Beza, Luther, and Melancthon, among the Reformers; Bengel, Whitby, and Doddridge; and, more recently, Olshausen, De Wette, Alford, Ellicott, Bishop Alexander, Wordsworth, Conybeare, and Eadie.

been received into heaven, but in *my* flesh, which still labours and is sorrowful on earth." "As," says Calvin, "Christ once suffered in His own person, so He suffers daily in His members, and in this way there are filled up those sufferings which His Father hath appointed for His body, the Church." "The afflictions of Christ," observes Olshausen, "can be understood subjectively of the mystical Christ alone ; that is of Christ so far as He fills the Church with His life and being. The Church of Christ which had suffered much from the very beginning, is to endure more suffering still by the dispensation of God ; a certain measure of suffering is allotted her which must be filled up. St. Paul supplies that deficiency on his part by his sufferings in the flesh." And he speaks of Christ as "the suffering God in the history of the world." "All the tribulations of Christ's body," observes Dean Alford, "are Christ's tribulations. Whatever the whole Church has to suffer, even to the end, she suffers for her perfection in holiness and her completion in Him ; and the tribulations of Christ will not be complete till the last pang shall have past, and the last tear have been shed. Every suffering saint of God in every age and position is in fact filling up, in his place and degree, the afflictions of Christ in his flesh, and on behalf of His body. Not a pang, not a tear is in vain."

But before we adopt this view, several objections have to be considered and answered. 1. Such a view, it is said, gives a figurative interpretation of the

afflictions of Christ ; it refers not to those which He endures in person, but to those which He endures metaphorically in His Church, whereas we ought to take "the afflictions of Christ" as personal and real. But to this it may be replied that the interpretation is hardly figurative. The Scriptures speak of Christ as suffering in His members. How this is the case, whether actual suffering is here spoken of, or whether this expression is a mere accommodation to our weakness, we do not know ; but still, the analogy of Scripture justifies us in taking St. Paul's words in the sense for which we contend. Bishop Lightfoot admits that this explanation cannot be charged with wresting the meaning of *αἱ θλίψεις τοῦ Χριστοῦ*. 2. It is objected that such a view introduces an unmeaning tautology into the text, compelling us to read it as follows : "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in His body, for the sake of His body, which is the Church." And certainly at first sight this appears to be the case ; but, on a closer examination, the tautology will somewhat disappear. The sufferings of each believer, and pre-eminently the sufferings of St. Paul, were not only a filling up of the complement of the afflictions of Christ's body, but were moreover, and in addition, for the sake of the body, tending to its edification and perfection. 3. It is asserted that the idea of Christ suffering in the sufferings of His people is nowhere found in the New Testament. This is the objection urged by Meyer. "He lives,"

he observes, "in His people; His heart beats in them; He is mighty in them when they are weak; He is their hope, their life, their victory; but nowhere is it said that He *suffers* in them. This idea, moreover,—which, consistently carried out, would involve even the conception of the *dying* of Christ in the martyrs—would be entirely opposed to the victoriously reigning life of the Lord in glory, with whose death all His sufferings are at an end. Crucified through weakness, He lives at the right hand of God, exalted above all heavens, and beyond the reach of further suffering." But this, as we have already shown, is not so. Does not the risen Christ accuse Paul, when persecuting His disciples, of persecuting Himself, as if He Himself suffered in the persecutions of His people?<sup>1</sup> Is He not repeatedly said to sympathise with us, and does not sympathy presuppose a certain degree of suffering? We cannot tell how the sufferings of His people affect the exalted Saviour; but whether in reality or as an anthropomorphism, in condescension to our weakness, suffering is ascribed to Him; and our ignorance must not be allowed to deprive us of the rich consolation which the conviction of His sympathy affords us, for what can more effectually sustain us under the wrongs and sorrows of time than the assurance that so often as we suffer for righteousness' sake, He suffers in us and with us?

<sup>1</sup> On Acts ix. 4, Meyer observes: "Christ appears as the one against whom the persecution of Christians is directed, but not as affected by it in the sense of suffering."

Upon the whole, then, we hold that the objections brought against this view of our passage are not insuperable, and are constrained to adopt it as the true interpretation. And, assuredly, it is of all views the most consolatory and sustaining. However mysterious the idea, we believe that Christ suffers in and with us, that He sympathises in all our sorrows. There is a vital chord which unites Him with us, as the Head to the body. Though He has gone up on high to reassume the glory which He had with His Father before the world was, He feels for His suffering brethren on earth, and is not unmindful of their sorrows. The perfections of His divinity do not obliterate the sympathies of His humanity. "We have not," writes the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."



## EXPOSITION XII.

### EXALTATION OF THE POOR AND HUMILIATION OF THE RICH.

JAMES i. 9, 10.

*Textus receptus.*—Καυχάσθω δὲ ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ταπεινὸς ἐν τῷ ὕψει αὐτοῦ· ὁ δὲ πλούσιος, ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει αὐτοῦ.

*Authorised Version.*—Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted : but the rich, in that he is made low.

*Revised Version.*—But let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate : and the rich, in that he is made low.

IN this passage there is no important difference in the readings of manuscripts ; that of the *textus receptus* is accepted by all critics. Nor is there any difficulty in the translation. Literally rendered it is as follows: “But let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation.” The difficulty lies entirely in the interpretation.

By the brother (ὁ ἀδελφὸς) is evidently intended the *Christian brother* ; because Christianity unites all those who embrace it into a holy brotherhood. The “brethren,” and the “saints” were the usual names employed to designate the members of the Church. Love to God and Christ unites all believers in love,

brings them into a common relation to God, their heavenly Father, so that they regard each other as brothers and sisters of the same divine family. It was only at a later period that the name *Christian* was adopted by the Church itself. That name was at first given about nine years after the ascension, by the citizens of Antioch, to distinguish believers from the Jews, in consequence of the numerous conversions of Gentiles in that city ; but it was not until some time after, that it was accepted by believers themselves, and gloried in as a designation of their religion. It occurs three times in the New Testament, and that in the mouth of those who were not Christians (Acts xi. 26 ; xxvi. 28 ; 1 Pet. iv. 16).

The word *ταπεινός*, rendered both in the Authorised and in the Revised Versions, "of low degree," denotes humble or lowly ; so that *ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ταπεινός* is the humble or lowly brother. It does not in itself necessarily involve the idea of poverty ; on the contrary, it is generally employed to denote a spiritual condition ; but here, where the contrast is with the rich (*ὁ πλούσιος*), it must denote the poor—the Christian who is poor as regards this world's wealth. The majority of the early Christians were of the poor ; it was to the poor chiefly that the Gospel was preached, and it was chiefly they who embraced the Gospel. It is probable that the unbelieving Jews by fraud and extortion deprived their believing brethren of their goods. "God," says St. James, "hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the

kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him" (Jas. ii. 5 ; see also 1 Cor. i. 26-28).

But whilst there is no difference of opinion as to who is indicated by ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ταπεινός, it is otherwise with regard to ὁ πλούσιος. Many expositors suppose that by the rich here is meant the unbeliever—not the rich brother but the rich man.<sup>1</sup> They assert that the rich in this Epistle of St. James, are spoken of as the persecutors of the Christians—the adversaries of Christ and His kingdom,—and are by him uniformly denounced and threatened with condemnation. So that according to them "the lowly brother" denotes Christians generally, because the majority of early Christians were poor ; whilst "the rich" denotes those who were not Christians, so that the contrast is between believers and unbelievers. And this meaning, they contend, is intimated by the words which follow : " But the rich, in that he is made low ; because as the flower of the grass he" not merely his riches, but the rich man himself, " shall pass away. So shall the rich man (ὁ πλούσιος) fade away in his ways." The words have been differently rendered. Huther supposes they are ironical : " Let the rich man glory in his humiliation ;" let him glory in that which is in reality his shame ; as St. Paul speaks of those who glory in their shame (Phil. iii. 19). Alford converts the conjunctive into an indicative, supplying *καυχᾶται* : " The rich man glories in his humiliation "—in his riches which shall perish. Basset supposes that we

<sup>1</sup> So Beza, Huther, Alford, and Basset.

have here an instance of the rhetorical figure called *zeugma*, in which two nouns are construed with one verb, though only one of them, the first, directly suits the verb; and hence he supplies another verb as *αἰσχύνεσθω*: "If the lowly brother is to *rejoice* in his exaltation, the rich man is to *grieve* in his degradation." But all such meanings are unnatural and forced. The most natural meaning is to take the word *ἀδελφὸς* as a general term, which is specified by the lowly and the rich. It is forced and unnatural to change the form of the verb in the two clauses; so that in the first clause it is an injunction, "Let him rejoice," and in the second it is an assertion, "He rejoices;" or to substitute instead of it another verb altogether. Nor is there any great difficulty in the expression, "The rich man shall pass away," as it is apparent that St. James alludes to the fleeting nature of riches. Thus, then, the complete words are *καυχάσθω δὲ ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ πλούσιος*: "Let the rich brother rejoice."<sup>1</sup>

By the rich man, then, is meant the Christian brother, who is rich, and by the lowly brother the Christian brother who is poor. The contrast is thus complete. Although it is true that the majority of the early Christians were poor, yet there were several among them who were rich. Mention is made of Joseph, a rich man of Arimathæa, and of Nicodemus, both of whom were men in an exalted position, being members of the Sanhedrim, of the Ethiopian eunuch,

<sup>1</sup> So Calvin, De Wette, Wiesinger, Brückner, Erdmann, Wordsworth, Plumptre, Farrar, and Dean Scott.

treasurer to Candace the queen of Ethiopia, and of Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor of Cyprus. And to the rich Christians there are special exhortations addressed, as when St. Paul writes : “ Charge them that are rich in this world that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy ” (1 Tim. vi. 17).

The objects, in which the poor and the rich brother are to glory, are contrasted ; the poor brother is to glory in his exaltation, ἐν τῷ ὑψεῖ αὐτοῦ ; whilst the rich brother is to glory in his humiliation, ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει αὐτοῦ. These objects have been differently interpreted. The common opinion is that the words are to be understood spiritually ; that St. James here alludes to a spiritual exaltation and a spiritual depression. “ Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation : ” let him, amid the depressing influences of poverty, glory in that elevation, to which as a Christian he is raised, in those spiritual riches which are conferred on him, and in that crown of glory which is in reserve for him. He is constituted a child of God and an heir of heaven. Although poor in this world, yet he possesses a treasure which moth cannot corrupt nor thieves steal. And, doubtless, many who were slaves in the world were the Lord’s freedmen ; many who were regarded as the off-scouring of all things were the Lord’s most precious jewels. This dignity was a proper object for glorying in, as it was conferred on them, not on account of their own merits, but from the divine graciousness. On

the other hand, "Let the rich brother glory in his humiliation ;" let him amid his earthly grandeur rejoice in that lowliness of spirit which the Gospel has conferred upon him ; that being made conscious of the vanity of earthly riches, he has been induced to seek after the true riches, to cultivate that spiritual abasement which is the prelude to all true exaltation. Although rich in this world, yet as a Christian he is poor in spirit, and clothed with humility. According to this interpretation, the contrast in the two characters presented is as follows : Let the brother, who is outwardly poor, glory in that he is spiritually exalted ; and let the brother, who is outwardly rich, glory in that he is spiritually made low. Here certainly the contrast is preserved, and a good and instructive meaning is imparted to the passage. It may perhaps be objected that such a meaning is figurative, or rather that it is a mixture of the literal and the figurative ; for whilst the poor and the rich are taken literally, the objects of glorying—the exaltation and the humiliation, are taken figuratively. And besides humiliation is hardly a proper object for glorying in, since for one to boast that he is humble is an evidence of pride.

Accordingly, other expositors<sup>1</sup> give a different interpretation. According to them the poor man is to glory in his exaltation, because poverty is his true glory. His lowliness, instead of being a thing to be ashamed of, is his true title to honour. Christ pronounces

<sup>1</sup> Plumptre and Farrar.

a blessing upon the poor ; He has consecrated poverty by being Himself poor, and by preaching the Gospel to the poor. The rich man, on the other hand, is to glory in his humiliation ; his riches are in reality a weakness ; they place him in a lower position than his poorer brother ; his true ground of glorying is to accept the position which God has assigned him with trembling, by reason of the dangers to which his riches expose him, and like St. Paul to glory in his infirmities. "Poverty and riches," observes Archdeacon Farrar, "stand in God's estimation in reverse positions. Humble poverty is true wealth. Pampered wealth is real poverty. Let the poor brother glory in the beatitude of poverty ; it is the gift of God. The rich brother, then, is worse off, is in a worse position than he ; his riches are his humiliation in the heavenly order, for they are a temptation to which he is only too liable to succumb ; they tend to make him more of a worldling, less of a Christian." Now such a meaning may be sufficiently appropriate for the first clause of the verse ; the poor may rejoice that they are placed in a more favourable position for salvation and for the cultivation of Christian graces than the rich. But it loses its appropriateness when applied to the second clause ; for the rich man can hardly be exhorted to glory in that which is a temptation, an obstacle to his salvation.

Others<sup>1</sup> suppose that when it is said, "Let the rich man glory in his humiliation," the reference is to

<sup>1</sup> Macknight, Wordsworth, and Erdmann.

actual poverty induced by persecution, to the rich Christian being stripped of his possessions for the sake of the Gospel; let him glory in being thus deprived of his wealth. Poverty was undoubtedly a common effect of persecution for conscience' sake. Men were then deprived of their goods, their lands, and their riches for the sake of Christ; they were exposed to fines and extortions because they declared themselves members of the small and persecuted sect of Christians. Both heathens and Jews combined in robbing Christians of their wealth. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the Jewish Christians "taking joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they have in heaven a better and an enduring substance" (Heb. x. 34). Now such a humiliation and poverty was a proper object for glorying in; it was for the sake of their blessed Master that they suffered; it was devotion to His cause that constrained them to surrender their earthly riches; to them it was given, not merely to believe, but also to suffer for His sake. "We glory in tribulation," writes St. Paul. Such a meaning is highly appropriate for the second clause of the verse, "Let the rich brother glory in his humiliation;" let him glory in the loss of all things for the sake of Christ. But it does not preserve the contrast in the first clause; on the contrary, those who adopt the above meaning give to that clause a spiritual interpretation; let the poor brother glory in his exaltation; "having been made a son of God by adoption in Christ, and an heir of His glory and



kingdom, which are promised to the meek and lowly of heart" (Wordsworth).

We consider then that the words admit of a more extended and literal signification. The poor brother is called upon to rejoice when he becomes rich; and the rich brother is called upon to rejoice when he becomes poor; the one is to thank God for the riches which in His providence He has conferred on him; and the other is to thank God for the riches which in His providence He has withdrawn from him; the exaltation of the poor and the depression of the rich ought both to be matters of thanksgiving and rejoicing. The contrast is complete; let us now examine the sentiment contained in this interpretation.

I. THE EXALTATION OF THE POOR.—Let the poor brother rejoice in his exaltation; that is according to this interpretation when he becomes rich. Riches are not in themselves an evil; they are not so antagonistic to salvation that one cannot possess them without endangering his soul; it may be difficult, but it is not impossible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. There have been many good men, many who have been ornaments of the Church of Christ, who have been men of wealth. "Abraham was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold;" yet his riches did not weaken his faith, nor prevent him being one of the purest saints of the Old Testament. Joseph of Arimathæa was a rich man, and he used his riches and influence in procuring an honourable burial for his Lord. And there are in the present day numerous

instances of men of wealth, and influence, and power, who are also men of piety, and faith, and devotion. Voluntary poverty is no virtue ; to apply those words of our Lord which were spoken in a particular instance, "Go thy way, sell all that thou hast and give to the poor," to all who profess to be the disciples of Jesus, is part of monkish superstition. There is no merit in poverty ; it is no recommendation to the favour of God ; money may be redeemed from the world, and deposited in the treasury of the Lord. Riches then are a cause of thanksgiving to God ; but they are only a blessing, when they relieve us from corroding care. If by the increase of our riches, our cares also increase ; if, so far from being less burdened, we become more burdened, then, of course, riches are no blessing, are unproductive of benefit, and are not conducive even to our earthly happiness.

Now the poor brother is permitted to rejoice when he is thus exalted ; when he is relieved from the evils of poverty and becomes rich. He is thus possessed of greater means of usefulness, and is the better enabled to promote the cause of Christ, and to relieve the distresses of his brethren. He is also to be grateful to God that he is free from earthly care, being raised above the depressing feeling of want, and that he is possessed of many worldly comforts and blessings. In his prosperity he is to realise the hand of God, and to thank Him for the many good things he enjoys. Let the poor brother rejoice in his exaltation, in that he is made rich ; but let him rejoice with trembling ;

for riches are a great trust committed to him and a heavy responsibility ; he is the mere steward of God's bounty.

II. THE HUMILIATION OF THE RICH.—“Let the rich brother rejoice in his humiliation ;” that is, according to this interpretation, when he becomes poor. Although riches are not in themselves an evil, yet they are undoubtedly a source of great danger. A rich man is like one placed on the edge of a precipice, standing in a most perilous position ; he must exercise constant precaution, otherwise he may be precipitated to the depths below. The dangers of the poor in being exposed to dishonesty, discontent, drunkenness, forgetfulness of God are often pointed out ; but these dangers are small compared with the dangers to which the rich are exposed. These latter are so great that our Saviour says of the rich : “Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matt. xix. 23, 24). These are strong expressions, so strong that they filled the disciples with amazement, and called forth the exclamation, “Who then can be saved ?” Poverty is a far more favourable soil for the growth of religious principles than wealth. The rich are strongly tempted to seek their happiness in this world ; to make the good things of the present the only portion of the soul ; and thus to live in forgetfulness of God and of the spiritual interests of their immortal souls.

There is more ungodliness and unbelief among the rich than among the poor. We are not sufficiently sensible of the danger of riches to our soul's salvation. We forget the solemn warning of our Lord, or tone it down, or explain it away. The striving after riches is the great evil of this age and nation; men are eager in their pursuit; they strain every effort; they do all they can to increase their business and to outstrip their rivals; and in doing so they are often tempted to have recourse to practices of doubtful honesty. The world is the great rival of Jesus Christ for the possession of the throne of the human heart. It has the advantage of bestowing, or at least of promising to bestow immediate happiness; the objects of its enjoyments are all addressed to the senses; and the baits it holds out are most inviting. Whereas the blessings which Jesus Christ confers are of a spiritual nature, and are addressed to our faith and not to our sight. And thus it often happens that the temptations of the world prevail and the soul is ruined, and led to the commission of divers sins (1 Tim. vi. 9).

Now, the rich brother is to rejoice in his humiliation; he is called upon to thank and to praise the Lord when his money is taken from him, when he is reduced from affluence to poverty, because he is thus freed from the snares and temptations of riches. This is indeed a high attainment in piety; it is one of the triumphs of grace over nature; but it is an attainment which has been made by many Christians. Riches are too frequently an obstacle to salvation; and when

taken away believers may have abundant reason to thank God that that obstacle has been removed. Many who, when in the possession of riches were worldly, proud, self-seeking, self-indulgent, striving to keep up with the world, and living in forgetfulness of God, have been rescued from this perilous condition by their riches being taken from them ; so that what they and others considered a heavy calamity was the greatest blessing which God in His goodness had conferred upon them. Many have been improved, and benefited, and purified, and made noble characters, by this discipline, like precious gold tried in the furnace. Thousands now in glory, and thousands on their way thither have come to bless God for failure, and disappointment, and poverty, and to sing with the prophet of old : "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines ; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat ; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls : yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. iii. 17, 18).

Let it be our endeavour to solve the true problem of life ; it is only when we do so that we have the key to the solution of all those difficulties which at present beset us. What is your life ? This is the question propounded. To this question St. James replies : "It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away,"—a mere smoke that is seen only to vanish. And certainly such is life, considered as

limited to this world; and from this also we may infer, as St. James does, the vanity of all earthly blessings. All that riches can do is only to make the vapour a little more dense and discernible. But, surely, this is not the true solution. Surely we were not sent into the world to live mere animal lives—to become a human machine—to make certain movements until the machine is worn out—to eat, to drink, to sleep, to wake, and to go through the same round from day to day and from year to year, until life comes to a stop. This cannot be the true solution of the problem of life. Life is a training, an education, a school, a discipline. Man, the child of immortality, is sent here to school, to learn those lessons which will be useful for him in another state of being. And just as a child learns to read, and to write, and to count, in order that he may be enabled to perform his part in after life, so are we taught by a process of discipline to imbibe those principles, to form those habits, to produce that character which will fit us for the employments of the heavenly world. And hence it is that God trains His children by a variety of discipline. On some He bestows riches, by which various graces may be exercised; and on others He confers poverty, which calls forth the exercise of other graces; and when God sees that this discipline is not productive of good, He may reverse the process, and take away the riches from the one and the poverty from the other.

It becomes us to remember that our lots are

ordained by God. "Our times are in His hands." Our riches or our poverty are the result of His Providence. If we are rich, our riches are ultimately to be traced back to Him as the Giver of every good; if we are poor, our poverty was the lot which God assigned to us. Every man's life is "a plan of God;" a plan sketched out and marked by Him. This plan may be marred by our folly and perversity, or it may be promoted by our acquiescence in it; by learning and practising those virtues which are peculiarly called out in our particular conditions. Thus, riches are favourable for the cultivation of the virtues of generosity, compassion, and gratitude; and poverty is no less favourable for the cultivation of the perhaps still more important virtues of patience, resignation, and submission. God will accommodate His grace to our necessities: grace both to resist the temptations to which we are specially exposed, and to cultivate the virtues which we are specially called upon to exercise. Our evident duty, in whatever condition we are placed, is to cultivate a deeply religious spirit; to keep near to God by prayer and holy communion; to employ those talents with which He has intrusted us to His glory, and to seek by the avoidance of everything approaching to what is wrong, to maintain a close walk with Him. By doing so, we will be able to maintain a thankful and even joyful spirit—to bless God for prosperity, and to praise Him in adversity; "Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation."

## EXPOSITION XIII.

### THE INDWELLING SPIRIT LUSTETH TO ENVY.

JAMES iv. 5.

*Textus receptus.*—Ἡ δοκεῖτε ὅτι κενῶς ἡ γραφή λέγει· Πρὸς φθόνον ἐπιποθεῖ τὸ πνεῦμα ὃ κατώκησεν ἐν ἡμῖν;

*Authorised Version.*—Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? (Marginal reading: enviously.)

*Revised Version.*—Or think ye that the Scripture speaketh in vain? Doth the spirit which He made to dwell in us long unto envying? (Marginal reading: The spirit which He made to dwell in us He yearneth for even unto jealous envy. Or, That spirit which He made to dwell in us yearneth *for us* even unto jealous envy.)

THERE is a variation in the reading of the manuscripts, which has an important influence on the meaning to be attached to this passage. Instead of *κατώκησεν* (*textus receptus*), the aorist of the verb *κατοικέω*, *to dwell*, the Vatican and Sinaitic MSS. have *κατώκισεν*, the aorist of the verb *κατοικίζω*, *to cause to dwell, to implant, to place*; the reading adopted by Tischendorf, Lachmann, Tregelles, Alford, and the Revisers, and which is better attested than the reading of the *textus receptus*, though it also



possesses considerable authority. The Alexandrian MS. has *κατώκεισεν*, which is evidently an *itacism*, that may have arisen from either of the two other readings.

A few remarks are necessary with regard to the verbal rendering of the passage. The translation *ἐπιποθεῖ* by *lusteth*—"the spirit that dwelleth in us *lusteth* to envy"—is unfortunate. The verb frequently occurs in the New Testament, and is elsewhere rendered by "long after" (2 Cor. ix. 14; Phil. i. 8), "desire" (1 Peter ii. 2), "earnestly desiring" (2 Cor. v. 2), and "greatly desiring" (2 Tim. i. 4). Perhaps "to long for" is its most appropriate meaning. In the other places, where it occurs, it is construed with the infinitive (Rom. i. 11; 2 Cor. v. 2; 1 Thess. iii. 6), or with the accusative of a thing (1 Peter ii. 2), or of a person (2 Cor. ix. 14; Phil. i. 8). Here it is construed with the preposition *πρὸς*, and hence it may signify "to have a desire towards," "to long towards," as in the Septuagint of Psalm xli. (xlii.) 1, where "so panteth my soul after Thee, O God," is rendered *οὕτως ἐπιποθεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ μου πρὸς σε, ὁ Θεός*; or the preposition and the noun which it governs may be taken as an adverbial expression.<sup>1</sup> Thus then *πρὸς φθόνον ἐπιποθεῖ* is to be rendered, "*longeth towards envy*," or, taken adverbially, *enviously desireth*. *τὸ πνεῦμα*, being neuter, may be considered either as the subject or the object of the verb *ἐπιποθεῖ*; as the subject, the words are to be rendered, "the spirit longeth;"

<sup>1</sup> See Winer's *Grammar*, English translation, page 529.

as the object, the meaning is, "He (God) longeth for the spirit." If the better-attested reading, *κατόκισεν*, be adopted, then the words are to be rendered as in the Revised Version, "the spirit which He made to dwell in us;" and, consequently, what is here predicated of the spirit must be good.

I. In considering the interpretation of this passage, the first thing to examine is the meaning of the first clause, "Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain?" These words certainly appear to introduce what follows as a citation from Scripture,; but no passage, either in the Old or in the New Testament, can be found which expresses the subjoined sentiment. Various passages in the Old Testament have been adduced as possibly referred to by the apostle, such as, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man," Gen. vi. 3 (Grotius); "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth," Gen. viii. 21 (Beza); "Neither be thou envious against the wicked," Ps. xxxvii. 1 (Lange); "The soul of the wicked desireth evil," Prov. xxi. 10 (Michaelis). Others suppose that St. James refers to the New Testament—either to the words of our Lord, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," Matt. vi. 24 (Benson); or to the exhortation of St. Peter, to "lay aside all malice, and guile, and hypocrisies, and envies," 1 Peter ii. 1 (Bengel). Others find the reference in the "Wisdom of Solomon (Wetstein), or in the apocryphal book called "The Testimony of the Twelve Patriarchs (Semler),

or suppose that it is borrowed from a lost prophetic book, or from some Jewish midrash. All attempts have, however, completely failed to find a passage similar in sentiment and expression to the statement here made by St. James.

Accordingly, several eminent commentators<sup>1</sup> think that the quotation cited is that contained in the next verse, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble," which is almost an exact quotation of Prov. iii. 34, according to the Septuagint. They suppose that St. James had this passage in view, but that, before adducing it, he interposed a parenthetical remark, "The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy, but He giveth more grace," and then returned to the quotation. But this is a forced method of removing the difficulty. The words are direct, and there is no appearance of any interruption in the course of thought. Others, in opposition to the testimony of all authorities, suppose that the words, *πρὸς φθόνον ἐπιποθεῖ τὸ πνεῦμα ὃ κατώκησεν ἐν ἡμῖν; μείζονα δὲ δίδωσι χάριν· διὸ λέγει,* are not the words of St. James, but a gloss which has been inserted into the text.<sup>2</sup>

We are, therefore, constrained to conclude that there is here no direct quotation from Scripture, or from any other writing; that St. James does not allude to any special passage either of the Old or of the New Testament; that the allusion is general, and not

<sup>1</sup> So Wiesinger, Kern, Huther.

<sup>2</sup> So Hottinger, Reiche.

particular; and that he gives what appears to him the general scope or sense of Scripture on the subject. Do you think that the Scripture saith in vain? Are its declarations made for no purpose? Is there no force in its assertions? This may refer to the sentiment that follows: "the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy." Or it may refer to what precedes: "the friendship of the world is enmity with God;" and may allude to the Scriptural denunciations against worldly affections, and the indulgence of hatred and envy. The special nature of the reference depends on the meaning which we assign to the words which follow.

II. Having come to the conclusion that the words, "Do you think the Scripture saith in vain?" do not introduce any particular quotation, but merely adduce the general sense of Scripture, we now proceed to the consideration of the more difficult part of the exposition, the meaning of the subjoined statement, rendered in our version, "The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy."

Some critics<sup>1</sup> unite the words *πρὸς φθόνον* with *λέγει*, and render the verse: "Do you think the Scripture speaketh in vain concerning envy?" or, taking *πρὸς φθόνον* as an adverbial expression, "Do you think the Scripture speaketh uselessly and enviously?" But such an interpretation may at once be dismissed as undoubtedly incorrect. It

<sup>1</sup> Gebser.

furnishes no proper, or at least no important, meaning. If the words *πρὸς φθόνου* are to be understood adverbially, it is difficult to see what sense can be attached to the question, "Do you think the Scripture speaketh enviously?" Besides, such an interpretation is linguistically incorrect; for if *πρὸς φθόνου*, like *κενῶς*, is to be referred to *λέγει*, it would require to precede the verb, and *ἐπιποθεῖ* would be left without qualifying words to complete its sense.

III. The interpretation given in the Authorised Version requires more consideration. According to it the meaning is, that the Scripture declares that our depraved nature is given to envy. By *πνεῦμα* is here meant the natural spirit of man,—that depraved state of heart and feeling with which we are born, or what St. Paul calls, "the carnal mind." Do you think that the Scripture has no meaning, when it tells us that man's nature is prompted to envy—that these bad passions, envy and worldliness, are inherent in fallen humanity? And in agreement with this meaning are the words which follow: "But God giveth more grace,"—grace to overcome these natural inclinations, and to rise superior to them: "Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."<sup>1</sup> Now it is admitted that this affords a good meaning to the whole passage. It has, indeed, been objected, that the assertion that our corrupt nature tends toward envy is a mere truism, and

<sup>1</sup> This meaning has been adopted by Beza, Grotius, and Winer.

therefore wholly unimportant. But we do not think this objection of any force; for the assertion suits the apostle's argument against worldliness and envy. The friendship of the world is enmity against God; that is the tendency of human nature; the declarations of Scripture on this point are plain; but, to counteract this tendency, God gives more grace. But the great and insuperable objection is, that the apostle speaks not of the spirit simply, but of "the spirit that dwelleth in us," and this is a strange expression, if by it is meant the human spirit. It rather suggests a spirit different from the human, not our own spirit, but "another spirit that dwelleth in us." Nor do we remember that *πνεῦμα* by itself is ever employed to denote the corrupt nature of man. Of course, if we adopt the better attested reading, *κατώκισεν*, "the spirit which He made to dwell in us," a good principle must be meant, and not the human spirit in its natural condition. Accordingly, the above interpretation has been relinquished by all our best recent critics.

In order to avoid the objection arising from the words, "the spirit which dwelleth in us," some suppose that the spirit of evil or Satan is meant. According to this view, the line of argument would be as follows: If you are worldly-minded, you are the enemies of God, you are actuated by the spirit of evil; for envy, which is the essence of worldly-mindedness, is of the devil; this is the meaning of Scripture—that the evil spirit that dwelleth in us

tends toward envy ; but God gives more grace to resist his temptations ; therefore “submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Here, also, a good sense is afforded ; there is nothing in this meaning which militates against the context. Still, however, such an expression as “Satan dwelling within us” is hardly permissible ; it is not a Scriptural representation of our natural state. Besides, the words which follow “He giveth more grace,” would require “God” to be inserted as the subject to express the contrast. If the corrected reading *κατώκισεν* be adopted, all reference to Satan is entirely precluded.

IV. We consider, then, that by *τὸ πνεῦμα ὃ κατώκησεν* (or *κατώκισεν*) *ἐν ἡμῖν* is meant a principle of good ; either the Holy Spirit who takes up His abode in the hearts of the regenerate, or the human spirit as sanctified by the Spirit of God. But, as already remarked, *πνεῦμα*, being a neuter noun, may be considered either as the object or the subject of the verb *ἐπιποθεῖ*. If it is considered as the object, then the verb has no expressed subject ; if it is the subject then the transitive verb *ἐπιποθεῖ* has no object.

Several critics of high standing suppose that *τὸ πνεῦμα* is in the accusative as the object of the verb *ἐπιποθεῖ* ; and they give the following translation to the words : “He (God) jealously desireth the spirit which dwelleth in us,” or, according to the other reading, “the spirit which He hath implanted within us.” They give to the words *πρὸς φθόνον* an adverbial

meaning, and render them *jealously*. They think that the metaphor introduced in the fourth verse, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses," is still carried on. God is jealous of your love: He will not permit you to devote it to the world; He will not admit of a rival in your affections; you are already His by right of property; He jealously longs after the spirit which He Himself has implanted within you.<sup>1</sup> Thus Kern says, "God longs after the spirit which He has made to dwell within us; that is, God will be the exclusive possessor of the spirit of the Christian, rendered capable of His fellowship." So Wiesinger says, "The love of God jealously desires, as an object, your love." Huther renders the whole passage as follows: "Or think you that the Scripture saith in vain?—rather God enviously desires the spirit which He has made to dwell in us, but He gives the greater grace—wherefore it says, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." And Dean Scott: "Or think ye that all that the Scripture saith of this relation (that of marriage) of God to man is unmeaning? Passionately, aye, with passion that is even terrible, He yearneth for the entire possession of the spirit which He Himself gave to dwell in us."

Now, although this meaning is supported by such learned exegetes it appears open to some objections.

1. The words *πρὸς φθόνου* certainly admit of the adverbial meaning; they are not, however, to be ren-

<sup>1</sup> This is the meaning adopted by Kern, Wiesinger, Huther, Theile, and Dean Scott.



dered *jealously* but *enviously*, as indeed is done by Huther. To express jealousy the phrase would require to be *πρὸς ζήλον*. That God jealously desires our love is a Scriptural statement ; but to say that God enviously desires our love, appears to us to be too anthropomorphic, especially as the word *φθόνος* is always used in Scripture in a bad sense. 2. According to the above interpretation, “God desireth the spirit that dwelleth,” or “that He has made to dwell in us,” is an obscure expression. So far as we can understand it, it can only denote the human spirit as sanctified by the grace of God ; but if this be its meaning, it is certainly a strange and unusual circumlocution. If it were the subject of the verb it would denote the Holy Spirit, but being the object it can only denote the sanctified human spirit.

V. Thus we are led to consider *τὸ πνεῦμα* as the subject of the verb, and if so, then it denotes the Holy Spirit. “The Spirit that dwelleth in us” is a familiar Scriptural expression for the indwelling of the Spirit in the hearts of the righteous. “Ye are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you” (Rom. viii. 9).—We have yet to explain the last clause ; what is meant by the statement, “The Holy Spirit that dwelleth in us *lusteth to envy*” ?

Some render the words, “The Spirit lusteth against envy.” They suppose them equivalent to the expression of St. Paul : “The flesh lusteth against the

Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh" (Gal. v. 17). According to this view *πρὸς φθόνον ἐπιποθεῖν* is equivalent to *κατὰ φθόνον ἐπιποθεῖν*. This is the meaning adopted by Luther in his German Bible: "Den Geist gelustet wider den Neid."<sup>1</sup> But it is an insuperable objection to the adoption of this interpretation, that it does not give the true meaning to the preposition *πρὸς*; it uses it in the sense of *κατὰ*. It is true that there are passages in which *πρὸς* with the accusative admits of the sense *against*. This, however, is only when connected with verbs or phrases denoting hostility (Luke xxiii. 12; Acts vi. 1); but not with such a verb as *ἐπιποθεῖν*.

VI. The most approved interpretation in recent times is the following: "The Spirit that He (God) implanted in us jealously desireth us as His own."<sup>2</sup> This meaning is in accordance with the representation of God given us in the Old Testament, as "the jealous God," jealous of the love of His people; and it continues the figure introduced by the apostle in the fourth verse. "We are married to one, even God, who has implanted in us His Spirit; and He is a jealous God, who will not suffer us to be friends of His enemy and His friends at the same time. The apostle is speaking of the eager and jealous love of God toward those whom He has united, as it were, in

<sup>1</sup> So also Bengel, Stier, and Lange.

<sup>2</sup> This meaning is adopted by De Wette, Ewald, Brückner, Erdmann, Alford, Basset, Farrar, and Plumptre.

the bond of marriage with Himself" (Alford). The objection that *φθόνος* does not denote jealousy, but envy, and is always used in Scripture in a bad sense, is thus ingeniously met by Dean Plumptre in his suggestive commentary: "The thought implied is, that the strongest human affection shows itself in a jealousy which is scarcely discernible from envy. We grudge the transfer to another of the affection which we claim as ours. We *envy* the happiness of that other. In that sense, St. James says that the Spirit, implanted in us, yearns to make us wholly His, and is satisfied with no divided allegiance. He simply treats the Greek word for 'envy' as others treated the word 'jealousy,' which, though commonly viewed as evil, was yet treated at times as a parable of the purest spiritual affection (2 Cor. xi. 2; Gal. iv. 17, 18). The root-idea of the passage is accordingly identical with that of the jealousy of God over Israel as His bride (Jer. iii. 1-11; Ezek. xvi.; Hosea ii. 3); of His wrath when the bride proves faithless. Those who had been addressed as 'adulteresses' (ver. 4) were forgetting this. All that they had read of the love or jealousy of God was to them as an idle tale."

The meaning thus given is beautiful, suggestive, and Scriptural; and the reason advanced for the removal of the objection arising from the words *πρὸς φθόνον* is plausible, but it is not conclusive. If the apostle meant jealousy, why did he not use the familiar word, *ζήλος*? Certainly, to ascribe *φθόνος*, a word always used in a bad sense, to God, would

lead to misconception, and be repulsive to the minds of his readers. Besides, in order to bring out the above meaning from the text, the words "us for His own" have to be added. The apostle's statement simply is: "The Spirit enviously desireth." If we give an adverbial signification to *πρὸς φθόνον*, there is no object to the verb. There is here an arbitrary supplement which the words do not warrant, and which, as we shall see, are not necessary to complete the sense.

VII. That which seems on the whole the best interpretation, and the one freest from difficulties, is to suppose that there are here two distinct questions: "Do you think that the Scripture saith in vain? Does the Spirit that dwelleth in us tend toward envy?" According to this *πνεῦμα* is the Holy Spirit; and *πρὸς φθόνον* is not used adverbially, but expresses the direction of the longing; and the twofold question of the apostle is entirely in accordance with the lively style of the Epistle. This interpretation admirably suits the context, both what precedes and what follows. Do you think the Scripture speaketh in vain? Are its denunciations against worldliness, and strife, and envy, a mere empty sound? Does the Spirit that dwells in us long toward envy? Is this the tendency of His influence on your hearts? Does He encourage such worldly affections? Are the fruits of the Spirit envy, strife, worldliness, and not rather love, joy, peace? God will communicate

His grace to overcome these evil passions, if we humbly implore it. Wherefore He saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.<sup>1</sup>

According to this interpretation, the words, Do you think the Scripture saith in vain? refer, not to what follows, but to what precedes; to the statement that “the friendship of the world is enmity against God;” and hence to the declarations in the Old Testament against worldliness and envy.

The interpretation of both clauses of the verse given by Calvin accords with that at which we have arrived. We conclude our exposition by an extract from his commentary.

“*Do you think?* He seems to adduce from Scripture the next following sentence. Hence interpreters toil much, because none such, at least none exactly like, is found in Scripture. But nothing hinders the reference to be made to what has been already said, that is, that the friendship of the world is adverse to God. Moreover, it has been rightly said, that this is a truth which occurs everywhere in Scripture.

“*The Spirit, or Does the Spirit?* Some think that the soul of man is meant, and therefore read the sentence affirmatively, and according to this meaning—that the spirit of man, as it is malignant, is so

<sup>1</sup> Such is the meaning adopted by Doddridge, Whitby, Macknight, Bishop Wordsworth, Professor Johnstone in his recent exegetical lectures on the Epistle of James, and the Revised Version of the New Testament. The verse is also thus punctuated by Griesbach and Scrivenir in their critical editions.

infested with envy, that it has ever a mixture of it. They, however, think better who regard the Spirit of God as intended ; for it is He that is given to dwell in us. I then take the Spirit as that of God, and read the sentence as a question ; for it was the apostle's object to prove, that because they envied, they were not ruled by the Spirit of God ; because He teaches the faithful otherwise ; and this he confirms in the next verse by adding that He giveth more grace."

## EXPOSITION XIV.

### THE SPIRITS IN PRISON.

I PETER iii. 18-20.

*Textus receptus.*—Θανατωθείς μὲν σαρκί, ζωοποιηθείς δὲ τῷ πνεύματι, ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασι πορευθείς ἐκήρυξεν, ἀπειθήσασί ποτε, ὅτε ἅπασι ἐξεδέχετο ἡ τοῦ Θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε.

*Authorised Version.*—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.

*Revised Version.*—Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit ; in which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which aforetime were disobedient, when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah.

ST. PETER, in his Second Epistle, observes, in reference to the Epistles of his brother apostle Paul, that "there are in them some things hard to be understood" (2 Pet. iii. 16), a statement which must appear undeniable to every one who is in the least acquainted with the writings of the great apostle of the Gentiles. There are in his Epistles many difficult passages which have puzzled expositors, and given rise to endless diversities of interpretation. There are

revelations of divine mysteries, such as predestination, election, and free will, which transcend the capacities of the human intellect. There is a certain obscurity of style, an involved train of thought which it is often difficult to disentangle. And there is a mode of reasoning which, although intelligible to Orientals, appears strange to our Western minds. But the observation not only holds good with regard to St. Paul's Epistles, it is no less true with regard to the writings of the apostle who made the remark. In St. Peter's Epistles there are also "things hard to be understood." Our text is a notable instance; hardly any passage in the New Testament is more difficult of comprehension, or has given rise to a greater diversity of meanings. These obscurities in Scripture are an exercise to our faith; we are to walk up to the light which we have, and to practise trust when the light fails us. They are also a valuable exercise to our intellectual faculties, an incitement to the study of the Scriptures, and to the endeavour to find out the true meaning of the word of God. And they teach us humility, showing that there is much in revelation which we do not comprehend, and that there are boundaries to human knowledge in the word as well as in the works of God.

There are two changes in the reading of our passage which are undoubtedly correct, and are admitted by all critics. The article τῷ before πνεύματι is omitted in all the best MSS.; and instead of the unsupported



reading ἀπαξ ἐξεδέχето (probably a conjecture of Erasmus), the MSS. and versions have ἀπεξεδέχето.

With reference to the translation, the Revised is here to be preferred to the Authorised Version. πνεύματι, is *in spirit*; ἐν ᾧ, is *in which*; ποτε, is *aforetime* or perhaps rather *formerly*; ἀπεξεδέχето is not "once waited," but *was waiting*. So that the passage is to be rendered: "Being put to death in flesh, but quickened in spirit; in which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which were formerly disobedient, when the long-suffering of God was waiting in the days of Noah."

The meaning of the context is obvious. St. Peter is exhorting believers to endure suffering for the sake of religion with patience, and even with a certain degree of cheerfulness. "If," says he, "ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye." To you belongs the beatitude which the Lord conferred on those who are persecuted. "Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled." If you have a good conscience toward God, if the cause for which you suffer is a righteous cause, you have no reason to be ashamed, but rather to glory in your afflictions. "It is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing than for evil doing." And as an encouragement to them to hold out and not to despond amid their sufferings, he adduces the example of Christ: "for Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit."

He like you suffered for well doing, the just One for the unjust ; but His death was succeeded by life, although He was put to death as regards the flesh, He was quickened as regards the spirit. And then follow the words which form our exposition, which are appended as a statement of what Christ did in the spirit, in which He was quickened : “ In which (spirit) also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which were formerly disobedient, when the long-suffering of God was waiting in the days of Noah.”

The exegesis of the passage is as follows :—There is an antithesis between the two datives *σαρκὶ* and *πνεύματι* ; an antithesis which is elsewhere frequently found in Scripture (Rom. i. 3, 4 ; Col. ii. 5 ; 1 Tim. iii. 16 ; 1 Pet. iv. 6). They can only be understood adverbially ; they “ mark the sphere to which the general predicate is to be thought of as restricted.”<sup>1</sup> As regards His flesh Christ was put to death, but as regards His spirit He was quickened. Hence the words can only admit of the translation, “ put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit.” It is also to be observed that the words *σαρκὶ* and *πνεύματι* are without the article, and are therefore to be understood generically not specifically. “ *Quod ad carnem,*” observes Alford, “ the Lord was put to death ; *quod ad spiritum,* He was brought to life. His flesh was the subject, recipient, vehicle of inflicted death ; His Spirit was the subject, recipient, vehicle of restored

<sup>1</sup> Winer's *Grammar of the New Testament*, p. 270, Moulton's Translation.

life. What is asserted is not that the *flesh died*, and the Spirit was *made alive*; but that *quoad* the flesh the Lord died, *quoad* the Spirit He was made alive. He, the God-man, Christ Jesus, body and soul, ceased to live in the flesh, began to live in the Spirit; ceased to live a fleshly mortal life, began to live a spiritual resurrection life." Most recent expositors understand by *πνεύματι* the human spirit of Christ; that whilst Christ's flesh was in the grave, His spirit in a disembodied state went to Hades and preached to the spirits in prison. Others interpret it of His divine nature. Christ was put to death in the flesh, in His human nature; but quickened in Spirit, in His divine nature. His human nature (*σὰρξ*) rendered Him capable of suffering and death; His divine nature (*πνεῦμα*) was the source and sphere of His eternal life.<sup>1</sup> The word *quickened* (*ζωοποιηθεὶς*) does not mean preserved or remained alive, but made alive, the antithesis to being put to death; some refer it to the existence of the spirit of Christ in a state of separation from the body, others to His resurrection life (John v. 21; Rom. iv. 17). *Ἐν ᾧ*, in which—i.e., *ἐν πνεύματι*, namely, in the same spirit in which He was quickened, whether, according to some expositors, His human spirit, or, according to others, His divine nature. *Καὶ*, also or

<sup>1</sup> It is to be observed that the resurrection of Christ is uniformly ascribed in Scripture not to Christ's human spirit, but to the power or Spirit of God (Acts ii. 4; Rom. iv. 24; vi. 4; viii. 11; x. 9; I Cor. vi. 14; xv. 15; 2 Cor. iv. 4; xiii. 4; Gal. i. 1; Eph. i. 20; Col. ii. 12; I Thess. i. 10; I Peter i. 12; even Rom. i. 3, 4, admits of this meaning).

*even*, or the simple copulative *and*. Πορευθεὶς, *He went*; this may denote an actual transference from one place to another—an actual journey of Christ, or, as is quite defensible, it may be used for the sake of emphasis, as when St. Paul says, “He came and preached peace” (Eph. ii. 17). *And preached* (ἐκήρυξεν); the word denotes the office of a herald—“He proclaimed.” The subject of His preaching or proclamation is not stated; but it cannot be doubted that it was the Gospel—the message of peace: for in this sense only can the word ἐκήρυξεν be used in connection with Christ; indeed, it is almost of the same import with εὐηγγελίσαστο. *To the spirits*, (τοῖς πνεύμασι); here evidently disembodied spirits, as in Heb. xii. 23. *In prison* (ἐν φυλακῇ). The word here denotes a state of detention or confinement, in which these disembodied spirits are kept awaiting their doom. *Which*, namely these spirits in prison. *Were formerly* (ποτε) in a former state, when in the body. *Disobedient* (ἀπειθήσασι), impenitent and unbelieving. *When* (ὅτε) the period or time of their disobedience. *The long-suffering of God*, His patience or forbearance toward sinners, *was waiting in the days of Noah*, during those hundred and twenty years (Gen. vi. 3), “when the ark was a-preparing,” and when Noah went about this earth as a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet. ii. 8).

So much for the rendering of the passage. The chief difficulties are to understand who are “the spirits in prison” (τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασι)? and what is meant by the spirit in which Christ preached (πνεύματι

ἐν ᾧ ἐκήρυξεν)? The spirits are further described as limited to those who “were formerly disobedient, when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah.” The purport of the preaching may well be understood to be the Gospel or message of peace; but the effect of the preaching is not stated—whether these spirits repented, or continued in their disobedience. The other difficulty is, In what spirit Christ preached to them, whether immediately in His own human spirit, or mediately in His Spirit or divine nature? in other words, whether Christ Himself descended to prison—to hell or Hades, and preached there; or whether the reference is merely to what He did in the Spirit in the days of Noah in His pre-incarnate state. Accordingly very different and even opposite views have been taken of this passage, and, indeed, the subject is so involved in obscurity, that all dogmatism and positive assertion as to its precise meaning ought perhaps to be avoided.

Before adverting to the various interpretations given to these verses, it may be proper to remark that this is one of those passages by which the article of the Apostle’s Creed, “Christ’s descent into hell,” has been supported. In the Articles of the Church of England, as first published in the reign of Edward VI., this passage is incorporated. The third article reads as follows:—“That the body of Christ lay in the grave until His resurrection; but His spirit, which He gave up, was with the spirits which were detained in prison, or in hell, and preached

to them, as the place in St. Peter testifieth."<sup>1</sup> This descent of Christ to Hades is directly stated by St. Peter in his address on the day of Pentecost, when he says, that "His soul<sup>2</sup> was not left in Hades, neither His flesh did see corruption" (Acts ii. 31), intimating that on His death His body was laid in the grave, there preserved from corruption, and His soul went to Hades.<sup>3</sup> The word Hades is unfortunately rendered *hell* in Scripture, and in the Apostles' Creed; it does not denote the place of punishment for which another word, Gehenna, is employed; but the place or abode of separate spirits—the intermediate state. Now the soul of Christ, during the three days which intervened between His death and resurrection, was in Hades; His *σὰρξ* was in the grave; His *ψυχὴ* was in the place of disembodied spirits. It would appear from several statements in Scripture, that there are two distinct regions in Hades; that the souls of the righteous inhabit the region of the blessed, called Paradise (Luke xxiii. 47), whilst the wicked are confined to the region of the condemned, called Tartarus (2 Pet. ii. 4), or in our text *φυλακῆ*.

In discussing the different interpretations given to this passage, perhaps the best method is to commence

<sup>1</sup> This clause, it is said, was omitted out of deference to the views of Calvin. The subject was stated at greater length and with even more precision in the "Church Catechism," published in the same reign.

<sup>2</sup> Here the word is *ψυχὴ* not *πνεῦμα*.

<sup>3</sup> St. Paul appears to allude to the same descent into Hades in Eph. iv. 9, 10.

with those which we have no hesitation in rejecting, and then to proceed to the consideration of the more plausible.

I. It has been supposed that the text alludes to *the preaching of the apostles to the unbelieving world*. "The spirits in prison" is considered to be a metaphorical phrase, used to denote either Jews or Gentiles, or both, who were in a state of spiritual bondage; and by Christ's preaching in spirit to them is meant the preaching of the Spirit of Christ through the apostles.<sup>1</sup> The Gospel, it is observed, is frequently represented as an announcement of deliverance to captives confined in a prison. Thus in the prophecies of Isaiah it is said, "I will give thee for a covenant to the people, for a light to 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" (Isa. xlii. 6, 7). "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those that are bound" (Isa. xli. 1). And whereas it is objected that there is no mention of preaching to either Jews or Gentiles, but only to those who were disobedient in the days of Noah, it is replied that the mention of the disobedient in the time of Noah is adduced merely by way of sample or type of the disobedient in all ages; the preaching of

<sup>1</sup> This opinion was maintained by Socinus, Hensler, Grotius, Bishop Burnet, in his exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles, Dr. John Brown of Edinburgh, and is mentioned as an alternative meaning by Bishop Leighton.

Noah before the flood was a type of the preaching of the apostles before the judgment, on which St. Peter specially discourses.

We have no hesitation in rejecting this interpretation; indeed, it hardly merits consideration. Such a meaning given to the passage is not to explain the words, but to explain them away; not to interpret, but to misinterpret them—to avoid a difficulty by a most violent expedient. Surely to affirm that Christ went in Spirit and preached to the spirits in prison would be a most extraordinary mode of expressing the simple fact that Christ was preached by the apostles to the Gentiles.

II. Some think that the meaning of the passage is that *Christ went in His disembodied state to hell to announce to the wicked confined there, as in a prison, their condemnation.* According to this view, the spirit is the human spirit of Christ in a disembodied state, and the subject of preaching or proclamation is not the Gospel, but the sentence of condemnation on impenitent spirits. This opinion is supported only by a few critics, and these not of great eminence.<sup>1</sup> The reason for its adoption is because it is supposed that the passage must mean that Christ preached to the spirits in hell, and as it was considered to be con-

<sup>1</sup> As Calovius, Aretius, Flacius, Zezschwitz, Schott. Hollaz, quoted by Huther, remarks: "Fuit prædicatio Christi in inferno non evangelica quæ hominibus tantum in regno gratiæ annunciatur, sed legalis, elenchthica, terribilis eaque tum verbalis, qua ipsos æterna supplicia promeritos esse convincit, tum realis, qua immanem terrorem iis incussit."



trary to Scripture to suppose that He preached the Gospel to them, it could only mean that He pronounced sentence of condemnation upon them.

Such an interpretation may also be at once rejected, as inconsistent with the words of the passage, and with the benevolent spirit of our Lord. The word *ἐκήρυξε*, in connection with Christ and His apostles, can only denote the preaching of the Gospel. Such a condemnatory announcement would be superfluous to spirits already in a state of condemnation; and it is highly derogatory to our Lord to suppose that, in the hour of His triumph, He should exult over the misery of the lost. Besides, the context forbids such a meaning. The words are in the midst of a passage intended to convey consolation to Christians under the sufferings to which they were exposed from persecution, by announcing the blessed consequences of our Lord's sufferings and death, and, therefore, are not to be forced to mean an announcement, not of blessing, but of wrath.

III. Rejecting these interpretations as perversions of the passage, we proceed to one more plausible, and supported by higher authorities. It is supposed that the passage alludes to *the preaching of the Gospel by Christ in Hades to the spirits of the just who died before our Lord's advent in the flesh, and especially to the saints of the Old Testament.*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This appears to have been the opinion adopted by Irenæus (iv. 27, 2), Justin Martyr (*Dial. c. Tryph.*), Hippolytus (*de Antichr. c. 26*),

“I have no doubt,” observes Calvin, “that Peter speaks generally, that the manifestation of Christ’s grace was made to godly spirits, and that they were thus endued with the vital power of the Spirit.”<sup>1</sup> An obstacle to this interpretation lies in the word *φυλακῆ*, which seems to express a place of penal confinement. Hence Calvin supposes that the word does not here denote a prison, but a watch-tower (Hab. ii. 1, LXX.) : “It seems to me that *φυλακῆ* rather means a watch-tower, in which watchmen stand for the purpose of watching; and the meaning would be very appropriate, that godly souls were watching in the hope of the salvation promised them, as though they saw it afar off. Nor is there a doubt that the holy Fathers in life, as well as after death, directed their thoughts to this object.” So also Bishop Horsley softens the meaning to be attached to the word *prison* by observing that “the invisible mansion of departed spirits, though certainly not a place of penal confinement to the good, is, nevertheless, in some respects a prison : it is a place of unfinished happiness, consisting in rest, security, and hope more than enjoyment.” “The original word imports merely a place of safe keeping; for so this passage may be rendered with great exactness and Tertullian (*de Anima*, vii. 55, among the Fathers; and by Calvin and Zwingli among the Reformers, and by most of the Roman Catholic theologians, in conformity with their notion of the *Limbus Patrum*. It has also been defended in an able sermon by Bishop Horsley.

<sup>1</sup> It must be confessed that Calvin’s words are ambiguous; indeed, it is difficult to say whether he believed in Christ’s descent into Hades at all. “The opinion,” he observes, “is common that Christ’s descent into hell is here referred to; but the words mean no such thing.”

ness: 'He went and preached to the spirits in safe keeping.'" What Christ preached to those Old Testament saints is considered to be the announcement of His victory over sin and death, which would give them the assurance of a glorious resurrection and complete salvation.<sup>1</sup>

Such an interpretation is liable to grave objections. Not only is it not permissible to soften down the word *φυλακῆ*, or to adopt the poetical sense watch-tower; but the interpretation is completely refuted by the consideration that the spirits in prison are not the spirits of the just, but the spirits of the disobedient. Horsley endeavours to avoid this objection by saying that they were indeed once disobedient, but were recovered from that disobedience, and before their death had been brought to repentance and faith in the Redeemer to come; which is merely an attempt to explain away the statement of the text. Calvin, on the other hand, is constrained to admit that the Greek construction is at variance with the meaning which he assigns to the

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Dante:—

. . . "I was new to that estate,  
When I beheld a puissant One arrive  
Amongst us, with victorious trophy crowned.  
He forth the shape of our first parent drew,  
Abel, his child, and Noah, righteous man;  
Of Moses, lawgiver for faith approved;  
Of patriarchal Abraham, and David king;  
Israel, with his sire and with his sons,  
Not without Rachel, whom so hard he won,  
And others many more, whom He to bliss  
Exalted.

"*Hell*," Canto iv. 50-59, CARY'S *Translation*.

passage ; but, in a most extraordinary and uncritical manner, he attributes this to a confusion in the apostle's language, and supposes that those who were disobedient in the days of Noah are different from the spirits in prison to whom Christ preached. "I allow," he observes, "that the Greek construction is at variance with this meaning, for Peter, if he meant this, ought to have used the genitive absolute. But as it was not unusual for the apostles to put one case instead of another, and as we see that Peter here heaps together many things, and no other suitable meaning can be elicited, I have no hesitation in giving this explanation of this intricate passage; so that the readers may understand that those called unbelieving are different from those to whom he said the Gospel was preached ;" which is certainly not to explain the words of the apostle, but to force them, contrary to their grammatical construction, to agree with the meaning which Calvin had adopted. The preaching, whatever it is, is not to believers, but to unbelievers ; and the spirits in prison are not godly souls in a separate state, but those who are kept in the place of the departed awaiting their doom.

A modified form of the above interpretation is adopted by some critics, who suppose that the spirits here mentioned are those who repented at the deluge. Not to all the spirits of the just was the Gospel preached, but to those who were disobedient in the time of Noah ; and not to all of them, but to those who repented at the last moment when the flood was

upon them.<sup>1</sup> This opinion was adopted by Bengel to escape the difficulties attached to the opinion of Calvin. "It is probable," he observes, "that some out of so great a multitude repented when the rain came; and though they had not believed while God was waiting and while the ark was building, afterwards when the ark was completed, and punishment assailed them, they began to believe; and to them and to all like them Christ afterwards presented Himself as a preacher of grace." The disobedience is mentioned, because it continued almost to the last. The passage, however, will not bear this interpretation. It is sufficient to say that it is a gratuitous assumption; the disobedience of the spirits in prison is stated, but there is no mention of their repentance.

*Why should we speak of repentance if they in fact repented?*

IV. The interpretation now most generally adopted is that *Christ went in person to Hades, and preached the Gospel there to the spirits in prison*—to those who in the days of their flesh were disobedient and unbelieving. Some suppose that He preached to all the disembodied spirits; others limit it to those who were disobedient in the days of Noah. They suppose that Christ preached the Gospel to them, with what effect is not stated; but it is generally supposed that the disembodied spirits, who were disobedient when on earth, had another offer of salvation made to them, and that those who embraced it were rescued from hell and

*if they in fact repented? even if it were at the last moment*

<sup>1</sup> So Suarez, Estius, Bellarmine, and, according to Bengel, Luther shortly before his death. Bishop Horsley also admits this view.

admitted into heaven.<sup>1</sup> "With the great majority of commentators, ancient and modern," observes Alford, "I understand these words to say that our Lord, in His disembodied state, did go to the place of detention of departed spirits, and did there announce His work of redemption, preach salvation in fact, to the disembodied spirits of those who refused to obey the voice of God when the judgment of the flood was hanging over them." "Christ," observes Bishop Wordsworth, "who before had preached on earth to men in bodily presence, now, after His removal from them by death, preached also to human spirits in the region under the earth, in the time between His death and resurrection." "After death," observes Canon Cook, "our Lord in His own human spirit went forth and preached to the spirits in prison, that is, to certain spirits, specified afterwards, who, when He thus came and preached to them, were not in bonds or penal duration as condemned criminals, but in custody, as prisoners awaiting their doom." Most expositors<sup>2</sup> suppose that the time when Christ preached to the spirits in prison was between His death and resurrection, the same descent into Hades being alluded to as that mentioned by St. Peter in his address at Pentecost. Others, referring the word *ζωοποιηθεὶς* to His resurrection, place it after that event. "He was

<sup>1</sup> This opinion, with various modifications, is adopted by almost all our great modern critics; by Huther, De Wette, Brückner, Formüller, and Wiesinger among the Germans, and by Alford, Wordsworth, Cook, Farrar, and Plumptre among our English divines.

<sup>2</sup> Bengel, Schmid, Lechler, Formüller, Alford, and Wordsworth.

put to death in the flesh ;” He laid aside for ever His *σάρξ*; “but he was quickened in the spirit;” He entered upon His spiritual resurrection life ; He received a spiritual body.<sup>1</sup> It is also generally supposed that those in the time of Noah are mentioned as an example of a like gracious work on others,<sup>2</sup> or for some reason concealed from us. In the days of Noah they were disobedient ; they died in disobedience ; they became the spirits in prison ; but now Christ having accomplished His great work of redemption by dying on the cross, the efficacy of His great sacrifice for sin extended to them ; He Himself descended ; He preached the Gospel to them ; He opened their prison gates ; He led captivity captive ; He triumphed over Satan by His cross, and set the captives free.

It is maintained that the true sense of the passage must proceed on these lines : that words could not more plainly assert that Christ in His human spirit went and preached the Gospel to disembodied spirits in prison.<sup>3</sup> Christ’s spirit between His death and resurrection was in Hades, and during that period He was actively engaged in saving the souls of those who had died before His advent in the flesh, who had never heard His name, and to whom no offers of salvation

<sup>1</sup> So Schott, Brückner, De Wette, Wiesinger, Zezschwitz, and Huther. “This passage,” observes Huther, “says nothing as to Christ’s existence between His death and resurrection.”

<sup>2</sup> So Farrar.

<sup>3</sup> “If language has any meaning, this language means that Christ, when His spirit descended into the lower world, proclaimed the message of salvation to the once impenitent dead.”—FARRAR’S *Early Days of Christianity*, vol. i. p. 140.

had been made. And this opinion is supposed by many to receive confirmation in the remarkable words of St. Peter in the fourth chapter of this Epistle: "For, for this cause was the Gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit" (1 Pet. iv. 6).

It must be admitted that there is much plausibility in this view of the subject, and that the authority of the distinguished divines, by whom it is supported, invests it with importance. Still, however, it is not free from objections. (1.) There is no mention elsewhere in Scripture of Christ going to the place of punishment—to the prison of the disobedient. The article in the Apostle's Creed: "He descended into hell,"<sup>1</sup> does not imply this. The Hades, into which He descended, was not Tartarus, the prison of impenitent spirits; but Paradise, the abode of the spirits of just men made perfect. "To-day," said our Lord to the impenitent thief, "shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." (2.) The idea that Christ preached to the disobedient after their death appears to be at variance with the analogy of Scripture. It would seem that this present life is represented as the only state of probation, and that the next life is the state of retribution;<sup>2</sup> and therefore, in accordance with the rule that difficult passages of Scripture are to be inter-

<sup>1</sup> This article was added to the creed at a late period, about the beginning of the fifth century. It is first mentioned by Ruffinus.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xvi. 26; Heb. ix. 27.



puted according to the analogy of faith, the above interpretation, though in seeming accordance with the sense of the words, is to be rejected. To both of these objections Huther replies: "That isolated ideas are to be found expressed here and there in Scripture, and that the reconciliation of the idea of a salvation offered to the spirits ἐν φυλακῇ with the other doctrines of Scripture, can at most be termed a problem difficult of solution; nor must it be forgotten that the eschatological doctrines comprehend within them very many problems."

V. The interpretation formerly considered as the orthodox one, and, though rejected by most recent expositors, adopted by the majority of former expositors, is that *the preaching here mentioned is the preaching of Christ, not in person, but in Spirit, through the instrumentality of Noah, to his contemporaries.*<sup>1</sup> According to this view, the πνεῦμα is not the human spirit of Christ, but His divine Spirit. Christ preached in Spirit, that is, not in His human but in His divine nature; not personally, as in the days of His flesh, but through the instrumentality of others.

<sup>1</sup> This opinion has been adopted by Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Beza, Scaliger, Leighton, Doddridge, Macknight, Whitby, Bishop Pearson, and recently by Besser, Wichelhaus, Hofmann, Schweizer, and Professor Salmond of Aberdeen. Beza thus paraphrases the passage: "Christ, whom I have already said to be vivified by the power of the Godhead, formerly in the days of Noah, not in a bodily form, but by the self-same power by which He rose from the dead, and by inspiration whereof the prophets spoke, preached to those spirits who now suffer deserved punishment in prison, as having formerly refused to listen to the admonitions of Noah."

In like manner as St. Peter had formerly said that the Spirit of Christ was in the prophets (1 Pet. i. 11); so the Spirit of Christ was in Noah when he preached to the inhabitants of the world before the deluge. "Every announcement of salvation," observes Hofmann, "which preceded His incarnation was a preaching of Christ, who had come in Spirit to man, and those who were not obedient to the same fell into a condition similar to criminals who are kept in prison awaiting their doom." Those to whom Christ was preached were the spirits now in prison, confined in chains under darkness, and who were formerly (*πρωτε*), when in the world, disobedient when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah. The period of the preaching was the age before the flood, the hundred and twenty years when the ark was a-preparing, during all which period the long-suffering of God waited. The direct preacher was Noah; not that Noah preached of himself, but that he was inspired by the Spirit of Christ, so that his preaching was in fact a preaching of Christ in the Spirit. Just in the same manner as St. Paul affirms that Christ came and preached peace to the Ephesians who were afar off and to those that were nigh (Eph. ii. 17), though He did not preach in person but in Spirit by His apostle; so it may be said that Christ preached in Spirit to the antediluvians by Noah.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Professor Salmond states the matter somewhat differently: "The preacher," he observes, "must be understood to be Christ Himself, not Noah, or Christ speaking by Noah. What is affirmed, therefore, is a gracious activity on the part of the pre-incarnate Christ, a preaching in

According to this interpretation the whole passage may be thus paraphrased : Christ in the Spirit, by the inspiration granted to Noah, went and preached to those spirits who are now in prison waiting the execution of their final sentence, and who formerly in this world were disobedient when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah.

Many objections have been brought against such an interpretation. 1. It is affirmed that "not a word is indicated by St. Peter on the very far-off lying allusion to the fact that the Spirit of Christ preached in Noah ; not a word, here, on the fact that Noah himself preached to his contemporaries" (Alford). But St. Peter elsewhere informs us that Noah was "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. ii. 5) ; and the spirits in prison are the same as those who were formerly (*ποτε*) disobedient in the days of Noah ; and therefore, combining these two points, it is at least a possible solution of the difficulty to suppose that the allusion is to the preaching of Noah by the Spirit of Christ to his contemporaries. Why the disobedient in the days of Noah are alluded to may be inexplicable ; but it is a difficulty which accompanies every other interpretation. 2. It is asserted that the above interpretation is opposed to the exegesis of the passage ; *πνεύματι* is used generically, without the article, and opposed to *σαρκὶ*, and therefore can only mean the human spirit of Christ, not the Holy Spirit,

the divine warnings of the time, the spectacle of the building of the ark, &c."—SCHAFF'S *Popular Commentary, in loco*. So also Schweizer.

nor the divine nature of Christ. To this it is replied that *πνεύματι* must refer to the whole Christ ; that as the whole Christ was put to death *σαρκί*, so the whole Christ was made alive *πνεύματι* ; and what is meant is that Christ preached, not in a bodily, but in a pneumatical condition. 3. "The same subject, *χριστός*, runs through the whole without a hint that we are dealing with historical matter of fact, when it is said that He suffered, was put to death, and was quickened, and with recondite figure when it is said that He went and preached" (Alford). This depends on the meaning assigned to *πνεῦμα* ; "in Spirit He went and preached." If by *πνεῦμα* is meant Christ's divine nature, then the words may refer to a preaching of His in His pre-incarnate state. 4. The particle *ποῦ* has to be inserted to support the above interpretation, as if the words had been *τοῖς νῦν ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασι* ;<sup>1</sup> whereas the words describe the local condition of the spirits at the time when the Gospel was preached to them (Alford). And this undoubtedly is a difficulty ; nor can it be removed by connecting, with Hofmann, *ποτε* with *πορευθεῖς ἑκήρυξεν*, "He formerly went and preached to the spirits in prison," as the words will not admit of such a transposition. Still, however, it is replied that the words may only indicate the local condition of the spirits at the time that Peter wrote. 5. It is also asserted that if the clause had stopped with *ἐκήρυξεν*, and if there had been no reference to the disobedient in the days of

<sup>1</sup> "Nunc in carcera."—BEZA.

Noah, we would have been constrained to adopt the interpretation that Christ actually went and preached to disembodied spirits. But to this objection the answer is obvious, that such a reference has been made by the apostle.

On the whole, it must be admitted to be difficult to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion ; the passage is one from which all dogmatism must be excluded. We have rather indicated those views which are to be rejected, than asserted that view which we regard as correct. Every interpretation is beset with difficulties. It is, however, to be observed that although the passage is obscure to us, it was not necessarily obscure to those to whom St. Peter wrote. They might have had information on this point which is wanting to us. St. Peter introduces the subject without any intimation that he was referring to an incident in the life of Christ with which his readers were unacquainted. [The key to the interpretation is to be found in the meaning assigned to *πνεῦμα*.] If by this is meant the human spirit of Christ, then we must seek the sense on the lines of the fourth interpretation, that Christ preached to the spirits in the prison of Hades ; but if by it is meant His divine nature, then some meaning in accordance with the last interpretation appears to be the freest from difficulties ; that the preaching of Noah, by the Spirit of Christ, to his contemporaries is alluded to. According to the one view, Christ preached immediately in His human spirit in the realms of the dead ; according to the other view,

Christ preached mediately in His divine Spirit by Noah. The analogy of Scripture is in favour of the latter interpretation.

The opinions of the early Fathers on the point under discussion are conflicting, but their general idea seems to have been that Christ preached in Hades to the saints of the Old Testament. The following are some of their most remarkable utterances: Justin Martyr and Irenæus quote a saying from Jeremiah, which they assert was expunged by the Jews, but which was found in some copies in the synagogues. Thus Justin Martyr says: "From the sayings of the same Jeremiah there have been cut out, 'The Lord God remembered His dead people of Israel who lay in the graves; and He descended to preach to them His own salvation'" (*Dial.* lxxii.; see also Irenæus, *Adv. Hær.* iv. 22). Clement of Alexandria says: "Wherefore, that He might bring them to repentance, the Lord preached also to those in Hades. But do not the Scriptures declare that the Lord has preached to those that perished in the deluge, and not to these only, but to all that are in chains, and are kept in the ward and prison of Hades?" (*Strom.* vi. 6). And Tertullian writes: "With the same law of His being He fully complied, by remaining in Hades in the form and condition of a dead man; nor did He ascend into the heights of heaven before descending into the lower depths of the earth, that He might there make the patriarchs and prophets partakers of Himself" (*De Anima*, chap. vi.).

## EXPOSITION XV.

### CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

I JOHN iii. 9.

*Textus receptus.*—Πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ, ὅτι σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει· καὶ οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ γεγέννηται.

*Authorised Version.*—Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in him : and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

*Revised Version.*—Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him : and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God.

BY “whosoever is born or begotten of God,” is meant he who is regenerated — who has a new nature implanted within him. Believers are throughout this Epistle designated as the children of God. Of such a one it is said that “he doth not commit sin,” or more literally, “doeth no sin;” a statement which must be taken with some modification or explanation, and the full meaning of which we shall afterwards consider. The reason of this non-commission of sin is because “his seed remaineth in him.” Some <sup>1</sup> refer both the *him* and the *his* to God : “because the seed of God abideth in God.” “His

<sup>1</sup> Bengel, Lange, and Bishop Alexander.

holy seed continues in abiding and vital union with Him" (Bishop Alexander);<sup>1</sup> so that *σπέρμα αὐτοῦ* is equivalent to *τέκνον αὐτοῦ*, and *ἐν αὐτῷ* to *ἐν θεῷ*; a meaning which is wanting in simplicity. Others<sup>2</sup> suppose that by the seed of God is here meant the word of God. This, it is alleged, is in conformity with the symbolic language of Scripture, as in the parable of the sower, and where St. Peter says: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. i. 23); and St. James: "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures" (James i. 18). But the word of God is not the seed itself or the germ of the divine life, but the instrument by which it is communicated to, or implanted in, the soul.<sup>3</sup> By "his seed remaining in him" is rather to be understood the divine nature implanted in the soul by the Spirit of God; the principle, or germ of the divine life, infused into the hearts of the regenerate; or, as the Scriptures express it, "Christ in you, the hope of glory;" in other words the spirit or the renewed nature, as contrasted with the flesh or the corrupt nature. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit" (John iii. 6).<sup>4</sup> The apostle next repeats and emphasises

<sup>1</sup> "Semen Dei, *i.e.*, is qui natus ex Deo, manet in Deo."—BENGEL.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, Grotius, Whitby, Macknight, Besser, Ewald, Alford.

<sup>3</sup> This is evident from the two passages above quoted; and in the parable of the sower, the reference is to the seed of plants.

<sup>4</sup> So Calvin, Beza, Neander, De Wette, Ebrard, Braune, Huther.



the assertion which he had made, "and he cannot sin;" words which are not to be weakened as meaning, "he can with difficulty sin," but which express the direct antagonism between committing sin and being born of God: "because he is born or begotten of God."

There are certain expressions in this Epistle of St. John which, taken literally without regard to the connection, and without being qualified or modified by other expressions in this Epistle and elsewhere in Scripture, would seem to assert the doctrine of absolute perfection,—that believers do or may attain to a state of freedom from sin. Such assertions are the following: "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not;" "Whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him;" "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in Him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not" (1 John iii. 6, 9; v. 18). But such assertions are modified or limited by other expressions in this Epistle. In no other writing of the New Testament is the doctrine of the universality of sin and its prevalence in the regenerate more strongly and emphatically stated. It is affirmed that if a man assert his perfection, he not only deceives himself, but actually makes God a liar. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unright-

eousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John i. 8-10). And with this agrees the language of Scripture. There we are told not only that all men sin, but that even the most holy are not free from sin; that absolute perfection is not attainable in this life. St. Paul says that "the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. v. 17); and that when we would do good, evil is present with us (Rom. vii. 21). And St. James affirms that "in many things we offend all" (James iii. 2). The experience of the saints agrees with these declarations of Scripture. All, without exception, are declared to be sinners. St. Paul is continually bewailing his sins and imperfections, and is eager to press forward to higher attainments. The Lord Jesus Christ is represented as the only sinless character who ever trod this earth—as One who, living in this world, was separate from sinners; who belonged to a higher and sinless order of beings.

There are some, however, who, whilst they admit that these expressions of St. John do not imply the attainment of absolute perfection, yet think that they teach the doctrine of possible perfection. They assert that there is a higher life, a state of Christian perfection, attainable in this life, and which it is the duty of all Christians to strive after. A believer, by constantly exercising faith in Christ—by drawing out of His infinite fulness even grace for grace, by abiding in Christ, and relying upon Him—may keep himself

free from all sin. There is ample sufficiency in Christ to preserve him from evil, and to enable him effectually to resist temptation. Christ Himself will keep him; the grace of resistance will be granted him when required. He has only to trust, not to his own endeavours, but in Christ, and he will attain to moral perfection. Christ is our sanctification as well as our justification. And this, according to them, is the meaning of those words of St. John: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

Now, in this and similar statements, the error lies in a perversion of the truth. This error may be so stated in connection with precious Gospel truths, and in such evangelical language, and may be so glossed over, as to appear plausible; but it is no less a snare and a delusion. It is admitted that it is the duty of every believer to aim after moral perfection, to seek to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. It is admitted that there is a sufficiency of grace in Christ Jesus, and that, if our faith were constant and perfect, that grace would preserve us from sin. But it is denied that moral perfection has been attained, or is attainable, by any believer on this side of the grave. The words of St. John, so much insisted on, do not assert it. The argument would prove too much. If these words are to be taken apart from their connection, and from other declarations by the same writer, they do not merely assert that it is

possible for a believer to attain to perfection, but that every believer—every one who is born of God, be the state of his spiritual life what it may—is perfect; that he not only does not commit sin, but that he is absolutely impeccable,—that he cannot sin; that, for him to commit sin is an impossibility; that, in short, this state of moral perfection is not merely attainable by a few believers who have reached what is termed “the higher life,” but that it is attained by every believer. The very fact that he is born of God prevents the commission of sin,—an assertion which none but the most extreme fanatics have affirmed, and which, in the age of the Reformation, gave rise to the grossest licentiousness and the wildest excesses.

So far from moral perfection being attainable in this life, an increasing sense of personal sin is an essential feature in the character of the believer; so that in the same proportion in which the believer grows in grace, he grows in the knowledge and feeling of his sinfulness. So long as a man is in an unconverted state, he is comparatively insensible to his sins; but no sooner is he quickened into a new life by the Spirit of God, than a deep sense of sin is awakened within him. The light of truth discloses the corruption of his moral nature. And this consciousness of sin, so far from diminishing, is a growing feeling. As the believer grows in grace, he discerns more of the holiness of God’s nature, and of the extent and spirituality of His law; and thus comparing himself—his feelings and conduct—with God’s holiness and

the law's extent and spirituality, he is led to discern his unholiness, his failures, and innumerable shortcomings in duty—the vast distance which there is between him and the holiness of God as manifested in the character of Christ Jesus. So, also, the more he attends to the state of his own heart and scrutinises his actions, the more does he discern his want of faith, and love, and spirituality—the more he sees the evils which are within him, the worthlessness of his best services. A sense of sinfulness is also felt in his efforts after moral purity, while he aims, as best he can, to live a more holy life, and yet finds a carnal mind within him opposing all his endeavours, and baffling all his efforts after holiness. So far from experiencing any feeling of satisfaction in having attained to the higher life, he takes his seat with Job in his school of morality, and exclaims, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

But whilst we thus modify the assertion of St. John, affirming that it does not and cannot teach the doctrine either of absolute or of possible perfection; yet, on the other hand, we must not so tone down the apostle's language as to weaken the force of his words. For this reason we consider that the words mean something more than merely that the believer cannot sin deliberately and intentionally.<sup>1</sup> Thus Calvin

<sup>1</sup> Such is the meaning given to the words by Calvin, Hopkins, Doddridge, Ebrard, Macknight, and Bishop Wordsworth.

remarks : " What the apostle contends for stands unalterable, that the design of regeneration is to destroy sin, and that all who are born of God lead a righteous and holy life, because the Spirit of God restrains the lusting of sin." " The interpretation," observes Bishop Hopkins, " which I judge to be most natural and unforced is this : He that is born of God doth not commit sin ; that is, he doth not sin in that malignant manner in which the children of the devil do ; he does not make a trade of sin ; nor live in the constant practice of it. There is a great difference between regenerate and unregenerate persons in the very sins that they commit. Their spot is not the spot of His children. And as they differ in the committing of sin, so much more in the opposing of it." Now, all this is true ; and the words of our text presuppose and affirm it. Believers are eminently a holy people ; sin has no longer dominion over them ; the new nature, which is implanted within them, strives against sin. There can be no communion between Christ and those who continue in sin. Hence it is that whenever a man is born of God, he breaks off his sinful courses ; he gives up those evil practices which formerly without much scruple he performed ; his whole life is one continued opposition to sin ; however far short he may be of perfection, yet it is his aim to avoid every known sin, and to perform every commanded duty : he that is born of God does not continue in the practice of sin. But all this does not come up to the full meaning of the

apostle ; he does not merely assert that whosoever is born of God does not continue in sin, or does not sin deliberately and intentionally, but that he does not commit sin at all, moreover, that he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

Nor, again, are the words to be merely understood of deadly sin—that whosoever is born of God cannot commit mortal sin. Such is the explanation of the Romanists. And in support of this opinion they appeal to a similar expression of the apostle in another part of this Epistle. The apostle is there speaking of the unpardonable sin, and he asserts that he who is born of God cannot commit it: “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John v. 16-18). It is argued that it is evident from the connection that St. John does not teach absolutely that he that is born of God sinneth not, but that he does not commit the sin unto death. Now, certainly this also is true, and is doubtless included in the statement of St. John. The true believer cannot commit the unpardonable sin, because his seed, the new nature, abides in him, and he cannot so sin because he is born of God. But the words of our text go beyond

this: they affirm not only that whosoever is born of God does not commit the unpardonable sin, but that he does not commit sin—sin generally, without distinction or limitation.

Further still, the words are not to be explained so as to signify merely that a believer cannot fall from a state of grace. "The apostle says," observes Calvin, "that those *sin not* who do not wholly fall away from the grace of God." Now, certainly, the perseverance of the saints is here taught us. When a man is born of God, the divine principle implanted within him cannot be destroyed. The examples of true believers falling into sin, given us in Scripture, both as a warning to those who stand and as an encouragement to those who have fallen, are numerous. But although believers fall, they cannot fall away: they are preserved in Christ Jesus; "His seed remaineth in them." Still, however, even this does not come up to the full import of the apostle. It is not merely said that "His seed remaineth in him," but this is given as the reason why he that is born of God does not commit sin. In other words, the permanence of the divine seed is affirmed not in the principal, but in a subordinate clause.

In order to the ascertainment of the true meaning of the words of the apostle, it is to be observed that St. John is speaking in a great measure of the *ideal state* of the Christian. The nature that is implanted in him is antagonistic to sin; it is holy, and manifests itself, not in the commission of sin, but in



struggling against it; so that if the believer were always to follow the inclinations of that new nature, he would not commit sin. He is raised above the power of many of the temptations to evil, and even when he does fall into sin, it is, so to speak, against his nature. Just as we say of an upright, conscientious man that he cannot lie, or cheat, or deceive, such things being contrary to his nature; so we may say of him that is born of God that he cannot sin, because sin is contrary to the new nature implanted within him. As darkness is opposed to light, so there is a similar opposition between the commission of sin and being born of God. At the same time, it must be remembered that there are remaining corruptions in the heart of the regenerate; and these remaining corruptions manifest themselves in sinful actions and feelings. Still, however, the great difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate is that in the regenerate the will is on the side of good—they sin contrary to their inclinations; whereas in the unregenerate the will is on the side of evil—they sin in accordance with their inclinations. It is this direction of the will towards holiness and God that makes the great distinction between believers and unbelievers; and to this, and not to any imaginary perfection, do the words of St. John refer: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin: for His seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

What, then, the apostle here teaches, is that the

new nature—the seed that remaineth in him who is born of God—is incompatible with sin ; that there is as great an antagonism between it and sin as there is between light and darkness. There is within the believer two natures, called by St. Paul the flesh and the spirit ; the flesh is the carnal or sinful disposition which, though weakened, is not destroyed ; and the spirit is the new nature implanted within him by the Spirit of God, called here, “ His seed which remaineth in him.” The flesh is the source of all that is evil, and the spirit is the source of all that is good. The flesh can do nothing but commit sin ; the spirit cannot sin,—proceeding as it does from God it is perfectly holy. And hence it is that St. Paul, in describing the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, makes a manifest distinction between them. “ Now it is no more I ”—the new man, the spiritual mind, the Christian Ego—“ that do it, but sin ;” the carnal mind “ that dwelleth in me ” (Rom. vii. 17). Sin is directly opposed to this spiritual life, as poison to our bodily life ; the two act as opposites ; every sin which the believer commits acts prejudicially to the life of the spirit within him. If the believer were actuated entirely by the new nature, if there were no remains of corruption within him, he would certainly be perfectly holy : “ whatsoever is born of God cannot sin ;” but as these remains of corruption exist within him until death, it is evident that perfect holiness cannot be attained on this side of the grave. With the spirit he serves the law of

God ; but with the flesh the law of sin. As St. Ignatius well expresses it: " Let no man deceive you. They who are carnal cannot do the things that are spiritual ; nor can they who are spiritual do the things that are carnal. Faith cannot do the works of unbelief, nor can unbelief do the works of faith."

The interpretation, which we have assigned to our text, is thus well stated by Besser: " Every one that abides in Christ, to whom He once belongs, does not sin, but says 'No' to sin, which belongs to the old man, and resists its alien power. A Christian does not *do* sin, but *suffers* it. His will, his Christian Ego, is not at one with sin. *Hatred of sin* is the common mark of the children of God ; *love of sin* the common property of the children of the devil."

The words of St. John so interpreted, far from extenuating or softening sin, impress us with a deep sense of its extreme malignity. The apostle uses strong and severe expressions to denote its intrinsic evil: " Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (1 John iii. 4, 6, 10). All sin is of the devil; all who live in the habitual commission of sin are the children of the devil; nay, even the sins of the believer arise from yielding to the temptations of the devil; his carnal

nature is the nature of the devil. Sin is utterly and completely incompatible with the new life. In proportion, then, as we yield to sin, we affiliate ourselves to him who is the source of all evil; in proportion as we strive against sin and cultivate holiness we are the children of God. And thus it is that St. John divides all men into two classes—the children of God and the children of the devil; he recognises no middle class; where evil prevails there is satanic agency; where good prevails there is the divine agency. On the one hand, “He that committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning;” and, on the other hand, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for His seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God.”

We have here, then, a great incitement to holiness. Holiness is essential to our Christian life; to produce it within our hearts was the purpose for which Christ came into the world; the salvation which He came to confer is a deliverance from sin; the new nature which He implants is antagonistic to sin; it cannot sin. And this holiness manifests itself not in self-satisfaction, as if we had already attained to the higher life, or a state of perfection, but in an unceasing conflict against all unrighteousness. “A child of God,” observes Luther, “in this conflict receives, indeed, wounds daily; but he never throws away his arms, or makes peace with his deadly foe.” If we have the seed of God, the divine nature, abiding in us, sin may sometimes assail us, but will never

prevail against us. Let us remember that we are the children of God—that we are born from above—and let us walk worthy of our high position and calling; let us regard sin as a deadly enemy to be resisted. He that is born of God has become, from being a servant of sin, a servant of righteousness; and although he feels a constant and increasing consciousness of personal sinfulness, yet he aims at spiritual perfection, and seeks to bring every thought and feeling into subjection under the law of Jesus Christ; he seeks, by the cultivation of the spiritual mind, to become more and more the child of God, and by the mortification of the carnal mind to be less and less the child of the devil.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The following list of meanings to these words "He cannot sin" is given by Farrar, *Early Days of Christianity*, vol. ii. p. 434.

He cannot commit mortal sin (Romanists).

He cannot sin deliberately and intentionally (Ebrard).

He cannot sin in the way of hating his brother (Augustine, Bede).

It is alien from his nature to sin (Grotius).

His nature and habit resist sin (Paulus).

He does not *wish* to sin, or *ought* not to sin (various Commentators).

He cannot be a sinner (*ἀμαρτάνειν*) (Wordsworth and so Didymus).

He *does* not sin, but only *suffers* sin (Besser; comp. Rom. vii. 17).

So far as he remains true to himself, he does not sin (Augustine).

So long as he is a child of God, he cannot sin (Others).

Several of these, however, are not different, but the same interpretation, differently expressed.

## EXPOSITION XVI.

### THE THREEFOLD TESTIMONY.

#### I JOHN v. 6-8.

*Textus receptus.*—Οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ ἐλθὼν δι' ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος, Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστός· οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι μόνον, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ ὕδατι καὶ τῷ αἵματι· καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα ἐστὶ τὸ μαρτυροῦν, ὅτι τὸ Πνεῦμά ἐστιν ἡ ἀλήθεια. ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσὶν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὁ Πατὴρ, ὁ Λόγος, καὶ τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα· καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἓν εἰσι. καὶ τρεῖς εἰσὶν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῇ γῆ, τὸ πνεῦμα, καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ, καὶ τὸ αἷμα· καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν.

*Authorised Version.*—This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

*Revised Version.*—This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and the three agree in one.

THIS is undoubtedly one of the most difficult passages of Scripture: the mere perusal of it will at once convince us of its obscurity. What is meant by this

threefold testimony? Especially, what is meant by the water and the blood? What is the object of their testimony? On what point do they agree? These are questions to which it is difficult to give an intelligent answer. Nor is the passage one of acknowledged difficulty only; it is also one of much critical controversy in the Church, and that in consequence of the clause referring to the heavenly witnesses, the genuineness or spuriousness of which has been much debated,—a controversy, however, which may now be considered as brought to a close.<sup>1</sup> It is to be observed that the doctrine of the Trinity does not in the least depend on the genuineness of the clause, inasmuch as that doctrine was asserted and maintained independently of it, the Nicæan Fathers never having appealed to it. “If,” observes Dr. Bentley, “the fourth century did not know that text, then Arianism in its height was beat down without the help of that verse; and let the fact prove as it will, the doctrine is unshaken.” Nor, on the supposition of its spuriousness, can it be considered as a deliberate forgery inserted by the orthodox for the purpose of giving support to the doctrine of the Trinity, but rather as a gloss, generally adopted by the Fathers, in explanation of the three witnesses—the Spirit, the water, and the blood—which, at first written on the margin, found its way into the text.

The following words in the passage *ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ*,

<sup>1</sup> The best modern defender of this passage is Bishop Burgess, in his *Tracts on the Divinity of Christ*.

ὁ Πατήρ, ὁ λόγος καὶ τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα· καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἓν εἰσι· Καὶ τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῇ γῆ— (“in heaven the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth”)—are so destitute of all critical authority that they are now in general relinquished. They are rejected by all our eminent modern critics — by Griesbach, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Huther, Tregelles, Alford, Wordsworth, Westcott, and Hort; though they have been defended by Bishop Burgess, and retained by Mill and Bengel. The external evidence is preponderantly against them. They are omitted in all the uncial MSS. They are contained in none of the cursive MSS. before the sixteenth century. Only three, or at the most four, recent MSS. have them, and in them the words appear to be a translation of the Vulgate. Among these is the Codex 34, or Codex Britannicus, from which Erasmus inserted the clause in his edition. They are found in no ancient version except the Vulgate, and even the most ancient MSS. of that version omit them. They are quoted by no Greek Father before the fifth century, and were never appealed to by the Nicæan Fathers in their controversy with the Arians. There are supposed to be allusions to them in the writings of the Latin Fathers, Tertullian and Cyprian; but even these are extremely doubtful. Thus Tertullian, in commenting on John xvi. 15, observes: “Thus the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete, produces three coherent



Persons, the one distinct from the other. These three are one (essence), not one (Person), as it is said, 'I and my Father are one' " (*Adv. Praxean*, 25). And again: "The Church itself is properly and chiefly the Spirit Himself, in whom is the Trinity of the one Divinity—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost" (*De Pudic.*, 21). But in neither of these passages is there a reference to the disputed words. The language of Cyprian is more important. His words are: "He who gathereth elsewhere than in the Church scatters the Church of Christ. The Lord says, 'I and my Father are one;' and again it is written of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, 'And these three are one'" (*De Unit.*, sect. 6). Here there undoubtedly appears to be a direct reference to the words in dispute; but the language of Cyprian is explainable on the supposition that he had only in view the words, "the spirit, and the water, and the blood," which, according to the patristic explanation, referred to the Trinity. The first undoubted reference to the words is by Vigilius Thapsensis, towards the close of the fifth century. Nor is the internal evidence in favour of their retention. Their insertion disturbs the unity of the context by the introduction of irrelevant matter, whilst their omission gives a connected meaning, whatever the interpretation may be. The words were omitted in the two first editions of Erasmus' Greek Testament, but were admitted into the third, on the authority of the Codex Britannicus. Luther never admitted them into his version.

Omitting this disputed clause, the translation of the passage presents no great difficulty, and is tolerably accurately given in our Authorised Version. The preposition *διὰ*, rendered *by*, denotes "that with which some one is furnished, the circumstances and relations amid which he does something—*by means of*."<sup>1</sup> The ordinary meaning of the other preposition, *ἐν*, *in*, rendered in the Authorised Version *by*, and in the Revised Version *with*, may be retained. In the Authorised Version, also, there is an unnecessary variation of the same word, rendered *beareth witness* in the sixth verse, and *bear record* in the eighth. The words literally rendered are as follows: "This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not in the water only, but in the water and in the blood; and it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one."

In the context, St. John is speaking of the believer's victory over the world by faith; and he observes that the great object of this victorious faith is the divine Sonship of Jesus Christ—a firm belief in Jesus as the Son of God: "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John v. 5). And in our passage he proceeds to state the testimonies or proofs on which this divine Sonship is founded. It does not rest merely on apostolic testimony, but on the testimony of other

<sup>1</sup> Winer's *Grammar of the Greek Testament*, pp. 474, 475.

witnesses, here designated the Spirit, the water, and the blood. The truth, then, to which these witnesses bear testimony is that Jesus is the Son of God, and that we have victory through Him; in other words, the efficiency of Christ's power for our salvation. *This is He*; the reference being to Jesus, the immediate antecedent, not to the "Son of God" (Huther), because what follows is not an assertion, but a proof of His divine Sonship. *That came*, a participial substantive—ὁ ἐλθὼν—alluding not to Christ's coming into the world—to His incarnation, but to His open manifestation in the world; to His coming as the Messiah, the Saviour of men. Hence he is called ὁ ἐρχόμενος, the Coming One. *By water and blood*; that is, by means of (διὰ) water and blood. These, as we learn from the eighth verse, are two of the witnesses of His coming as the Saviour—two of the testimonies to His divine Sonship; for the meaning of the words "water and blood" in the sixth verse must be the same as in the eighth verse. *Even Jesus Christ*—Jesus the Christ, the Son of God and the Saviour of the world; a solemn reassertion of our Lord's person and office. *Not in the water only, but in the water and in the blood: and it is the Spirit that beareth witness*—that co-operates with the above two testimonies, *because the Spirit is the truth*. There are thus three witnesses and a threefold testimony. First there is the water and the blood, and to these is added the Spirit. Accordingly, these three witnesses are stated together: *For there are three that bear witness,*

*the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one.* There is a unity—an agreement in their testimony.

Such is the context and general import of the passage. The chief difficulty lies in the meaning to be assigned to the water and the blood. Accordingly, very different interpretations have been given to these terms. We shall first enumerate some meanings which we judge to be obviously erroneous, and then proceed to consider those which are more plausible. Some<sup>1</sup> understand the *water* as the emblem of the purity and innocence of Christ, and the *blood* as the emblem of His death, being that of a martyr to the truth of His doctrine. Others<sup>2</sup> suppose that the *water* represents regeneration and faith, and the *blood* knowledge. And others<sup>3</sup> understand the *water* as the emblem of purity, holiness, and sanctification, and the *blood* as the emblem of expiation, forgiveness, or justification; so that in the water and in the blood we have complete salvation, deliverance from the power as well as from the guilt of sin. Calvin, on the other hand, supposes that in the water and in the blood we have a reference to the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish law, which were chiefly comprised in the washing with water and in the shedding of blood. "I doubt not," he observes, "that by the words *water and blood* the apostle alludes to the ancient rites of the law. The comparison, moreover, is intended for

<sup>1</sup> Socinius, Grotius.

<sup>2</sup> Clemens Alexandrinus.

<sup>3</sup> Doddridge.

this end, not only that we may know that the law of Moses was abolished by the coming of Christ, but that we may seek in Him the fulfilment of those things which the ceremonies formerly typified. And though they were of various kinds, yet under these two the apostle denotes the whole perfection of holiness and righteousness ; for by water was all filth washed away, so that we may come before God pure and clean, and by blood was expiation made, and a pledge given of a full reconciliation with God ; but the law only shadowed forth by external symbols what was to be really and fully performed by the Messiah.”

A much more plausible opinion than any of these is that the water and the blood signify the *two sacraments of the New Testament*. By the *water* is meant baptism, that being the element employed in this ordinance, and “the washing with water” being a usual mode of expressing baptism. And by the *blood* is meant the Lord’s Supper, as it was the atoning death of Christ that was represented by it : “This cup is the new testament in My blood.” In baptism our regeneration or purity is signified, and in the Lord’s Supper our forgiveness.<sup>1</sup> Now, it must be admitted that there is considerable plausibility in this view. It invests the sacraments with peculiar importance, as being the continued attestations to the divine Sonship of Christ, and to the living power which

<sup>1</sup> This opinion, with some variations, is adopted by the Roman Catholic divines, and by Besser, Macknight, and Bishop Alexander.

resides in His person. But the water and the blood, by which our Lord came, must point to some historical facts in His life, and cannot be interpreted symbolically: "This is He who came by water and blood;" whereas in these sacraments Christ is only represented; He comes in them only in a figurative and symbolical manner. And, besides, the third testimony, that of the Spirit, is here overlooked; for the sacraments are two, not three. Some critics, to remove this objection, suppose that by the Spirit a third sacrament, that of absolution, is intended,—a supposition which has nothing to commend it.

It is a common supposition that by *ὕδωρ* and *αἷμα* St. John in his Epistle refers to the fact, to which he bears witness in his Gospel, that blood and water flowed from the wounded side of Jesus when He hung dead upon the cross: "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (John xix. 34, 35). That John had in his mind this incident in the death of Christ, which made such a deep impression upon him, when he wrote these words of our text, is possible; but the words can have no direct reference to them. The effusion of blood and water from the side of Christ was no proof of his divine Sonship, but the evidence of the reality of His death; and we are not at liberty to put an allegorical meaning into that which is a statement of fact. And, besides, the

addition of the words, "Not in the water only, but in the water and in the blood," would be unintelligible, as in this historical fact there is no antithesis between the water and the blood; nor did any one suppose that only water flowed from the pierced side of Jesus.

Having thus stated what we judge are erroneous interpretations of the terms the water and the blood, we now come to consider the true meaning. It is to be observed that the apostle is speaking of the mode of the coming, the open manifestation of Jesus: "He came by water and blood." There is not much difficulty in the meaning of the *blood*, as applied to Jesus. This must refer to His death, to the shedding of His blood on the cross. His blood was poured out for our sakes; and it is by reason of this that He is constituted our Saviour. "We have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col. i. 14). Jesus came by blood, when He died for us. And as the blood constituted the close, so the water was the commencement of His public ministry. By this is probably meant His baptism, His solemn consecration to His Messianic office, His inauguration as the Saviour of the world. He was thus set apart as the Christ, the Messiah. Jesus, then, came by water when He was baptised by the Baptist in the Jordan. His public ministry commenced with His baptism, and closed with His death. Thus the pouring out of His blood was the completion of His baptism. He underwent a twofold baptism—a baptism by water,

which inaugurated His ministry, and a baptism by blood, which closed it ; and hence, in reference to His death, He said : “ I have a baptism to be baptised with ; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished ! ” (Luke xii. 50).<sup>1</sup>

To these witnesses—the water or the baptism of Christ, and the blood or His death—is added a third, the Spirit : “ And it is the Spirit that beareth witness.” By the Spirit is obviously intended the Holy Spirit, and by the witness of the Spirit is meant His testimony to Jesus as the Son of God. We accordingly dismiss at once all those interpretations which give to the term *Spirit* a different meaning, as being inadequate and unnatural. Thus, for example, Augustine explains it of the spirit which Jesus, when dying, commended to God, saying, “ Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit ; ” Wetstein, of the whole human nature of Christ, which He offered up as a sacrifice on the cross ; Grotius, of the divine power by which Christ performed His miracles ; Carpzovius, of the doctrine of Christ ; others, of His resurrection, and others of the spiritual man. It is also to be observed that the witness of the Spirit is distinct and separate from that of the water and the blood, and must not be confounded with them. There are not two, but three who bear witness. For this reason, we must not, with Macknight, interpret the testimony of the Spirit as consisting in His descent on Christ at His baptism,

<sup>1</sup> Such, with some variations, is the interpretation given by Neander, Lange, Lücke. Brückner, Huther, Braune, and Alford.



which is the testimony of the water ; nor as being specially concerned with the death of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God, which is the testimony of the blood.

It was an opinion common among the Fathers<sup>1</sup> that by these three witnesses—the Spirit, the water, and the blood—the three Divine Persons in the sacred Trinity are meant,—an opinion apparently favoured by Bishop Wordsworth : “ First, the Spirit, who begins the work of regeneration by applying all quickening grace to man ; secondly, the water, the symbol and instrument of the new birth derived from God the Father, who is the original well-spring and fountain of all life and grace to man ; and, thirdly, the blood, symbolising the incarnation and passion of God the Son, through whom all grace descends from the Father by the Holy Spirit. These three Persons are joined consubstantially into one Godhead ; and their witness is the witness of God ” (Wordsworth). Similarly, Bishop Andrews observes : “ Water denotes creation by the Father ; blood, redemption by Christ ; and the Spirit, unction to complete all. There is the baptism of water, the work of creation by the Father ; the baptism of blood, the work of redemption by the Son ; and the baptism of fire, the work of purification by the Spirit.” The supposition is ingenious, but it appears extremely fanciful. It puts a meaning into the words of Scripture which they do not naturally

<sup>1</sup> So Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine.

bear, and it is an evident departure from the literal into the mystical interpretation, which all exegetes should carefully avoid.

Such, then, are the three witnesses to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God—the water, the blood, and the Spirit, who are mentioned together in a different order in the eighth verse: “For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, the water, and the blood.” Let us consider the testimony of each of these witnesses to the Divine Sonship of Christ.

I. THE TESTIMONY OF THE WATER.—“This is He that came by water;” that is, as we have interpreted the expression, the testimony to Christ’s Divine Sonship given at His baptism. We have the testimony of the Baptist himself to this effect: “And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him. And I knew Him not; but He that sent me to baptise with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptiseth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John i. 32-34). But there was present at the baptism of Jesus a greater witness than that of John. We have not merely the testimony of John, but the testimony of God Himself; for we read that “Jesus, when He was baptised, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and

lighting upon Him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. iii. 16, 17). Thus, at His baptism, Jesus was declared to be the Son of God. And this testimony of the water to His Divine Sonship was not transient, but is continued in the Christian Church by the institution of the sacrament of baptism. We are baptised into Christ; that is, into the belief of His Divine Sonship, and into the consecration of ourselves to His service.

II. THE TESTIMONY OF THE BLOOD.—"This is He who came by blood;" that is, as we have interpreted the expression, the testimony to Christ's divine Sonship given at His death. In the peculiar nature of His sufferings and death we have the fulfilment of all those ancient prophecies which predicted the sufferings of the Messiah. He Himself, both before Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate, avowed His Sonship. Before Caiaphas He expressly admitted that He was the Christ the Son of God; and before Pilate He witnessed a good confession, when He declared Himself to be the King of Truth. There were other notable testimonies at His death. The centurion, who attended upon His crucifixion, avowed his conviction that this was the Son of God. God Himself bore witness to His Son. He caused all nature to mourn; the sun veiled its countenance, and the earth gave forth groans. But especially the resurrection of Christ, which quickly followed His death, was the

crowning testimony to His Sonship. The cross by itself may be regarded as the emblem of weakness, but by the resurrection it was constituted the emblem of victory and triumph; for although He was crucified through weakness, yet He liveth by the power of God, and was thus declared to be the Son of God, with power, by His resurrection from the dead. On all these accounts, it may well be affirmed, that Christ came attested as the Son of God by blood as well as by water. And this testimony of the blood also is not transient, but continued. It is on account of the efficacy of the death of Christ that sinners are pardoned, rescued from sin and Satan, and restored to holiness and God. The death of Christ is the procuring cause of the salvation of every one who is admitted into heaven. It is because they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, that they appear before God in glory. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John i. 7).<sup>1</sup>

The apostle puts a certain emphasis on the blood: "Not in the water only, but in the water and in the blood." This is evidently inserted not as a mere observation, but for some special purpose. Some suppose that a preference is here given to the blood as the greater witness of the two, inasmuch as the death of Christ was more important and efficacious than His baptism. He then finished the great work

<sup>1</sup> So also this testimony of the blood is continued in the Christian Church by the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

which was given Him to do ; He then accomplished our salvation. Others think that there is here a reference to the baptism of John—John's baptism was only a baptism of water. "I indeed," he says, "baptise you with water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matt. iii. 11). The baptism of Jesus was not only one of water, but of blood. John was the forerunner; he preached the baptism of repentance, as a preparation for the kingdom. Christ was the Messiah Himself, the Founder of the kingdom. John was the mere voice, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord;" Christ was the Lord Himself. John pointed to the way; Christ Himself was the Way. John came by water only; Christ came both by water and blood. But the words seem rather to have a polemic import. St. John's Epistle was especially directed against those who denied that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. It is generally admitted that Cerinthus had at this time published his heresy. He distinguished between Jesus and the Christ. He supposed that the Christ, the divine Aeon, descended upon Jesus, a holy but mortal man, at His baptism; but that at His death the Christ withdrew to heaven, whilst only the man Jesus suffered; in short, that Christ came in the water, but not in the blood. Now, this severance of Jesus Christ the apostle utterly repudiates. Jesus Christ came not only in the water, but in the water and in the blood;

not merely at His baptism, but at His death, He was declared to be the Son of God. He came in the flesh, and He suffered in the flesh.

III. THE TESTIMONY OF THE SPIRIT.—“And it is the Spirit that beareth witness;” that is, as we have interpreted the expression, the testimony to Christ’s divine Sonship given by the Spirit. It is the peculiar office of the Holy Spirit to bear witness to Christ. “When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me” (John xv. 26). And again, “He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you” (John xvi. 14). The glory of Christ is the great aim of all the Spirit’s manifestations. He inspired the ancient prophets to foretell the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. He endowed the apostles with the power of working miracles to be the preachers of Christ’s Gospel and the propagators of His religion to the world. He convinces the world of the righteousness of Christ, that He is exalted as King among the nations. He reveals to believers the glory of Christ, as the Son of God and the Saviour of men. He works in them faith in Christ, and thus brings them into living fellowship with Christ. He inspires them with loyalty and affection to Christ, and thus converts them into the devoted servants of Christ. He fills them with zeal for Christ’s cause, and for the diffusion of Christ’s Gospel; and He displays to them

the riches of Christ's grace, that in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. The character also which the Spirit forms in the heart of believers is the character of Christ; that same spirit of forgiveness, which was displayed by the Lord on the cross, causes them to forgive their enemies; that love, which induced Him to descend from heaven to earth, inspires them to seek the salvation of their erring brethren; that devotion, which caused Him to spend whole nights in prayer, is seen in their prayers and watchings; that resignation, which He exhibited in the dark hour of His agony, is dimly reflected by them in all their trials and sufferings; and so they become living epistles of Christ, known and read of all men. Thus does the Spirit, in all His operations, testify of Christ; He displays to us the efficacy of His blood, the prevalence of His intercession, and the power of His grace and love. And this testimony is a continued and abiding testimony; the Spirit is given to the Church to abide with it for ever.

The apostle adds, "Because the Spirit is the Truth." The Holy Spirit is called by our Lord the Spirit of Truth (John xv. 26; xvi. 13). He is the *Absolute Truth*; and what He testifies must be true; indeed, it is the testimony of that God who cannot lie. And in this consists the importance and infallibility of this testimony. As the Spirit of Truth, it is His great office to guide into all truth.

Such, then, are the three testimonies or witnesses. "For there are three that bear witness." There is

thus a sufficiency in the testimony, according to the requirements of the law: "In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established" (Matt. xviii. 16). "The Spirit, the water, and the blood." The Spirit is here mentioned first, because He is the most important and living witness. He it is who imparts life and efficiency to the other two, the water and the blood. He it is whose office it is to apply the work of Christ to our salvation. He it is without whose divine operation and countenance all other operations are in vain. He it is whose presence in the soul is the life of the believer, and whose permanence in the world is the life of the Church. He is the Truth, and, unless enlightened by Him, we will fall into confusion and error. Such are the three witnesses—*the Spirit*, the Third Person of the blessed Trinity; *the water*, the baptism of Christ, His consecration to His ministry; and *the blood*, the death of Christ—that great sacrifice which He offered up for sin. Jesus Christ came by *water*, when He entered on His ministry; by *blood*, when He expired on the cross; and by the *Spirit*, when in heaven He pours out the influences of His Spirit upon believers.

The agreement of the testimony of these three witnesses is stated: "And the three agree in one." The point on which they agree is that Jesus is the Son of God. We have seen this agreement when we considered the respective testimonies. At His baptism not only the Baptist, but God Himself declared that Jesus was the Son of God; at His death, accom-



panied by His resurrection, the same declaration was made (Rom. i. 4); and the peculiar work of the Spirit is to glorify Christ by proclaiming a belief in His Sonship. Nor is this a mere testimony borne at definite periods, but a perpetual witness to Christ's Sonship in the Church, even to the end of time. The Spirit, the water, and the blood still bear witness in the Church; their testimony is a present testimony. The testimony of the Spirit is seen in every sinner who is turned from sin to God, and in every believer who by a holy walk adorns the Gospel of Christ. The testimony of the water is seen in every administration of the holy sacrament of baptism, whereby we are solemnly dedicated to Christ, and incorporated into His Church. And the testimony of the blood is seen in the efficacy of the atonement, in the forgiveness of our sins, in our restoration to the favour of God, and at length in our admission into heaven. "This, their one testimony," observes Dean Alford, "is given by the purification in the water of baptism into His name (John iii. 5); by the continual cleansing from all sin which we enjoy in and by His atoning blood; by the inward witness of His Spirit which He hath given us."

Such is the explanation of this somewhat difficult passage. It may, we think, be briefly paraphrased as follows: We have abundant reason to believe that Jesus is the Son of God; for this Jesus is He who came and was manifested by water, when at His baptism He was declared by an audible

voice from heaven to be God's own Son; and by blood, when at His death He witnessed a good confession; and at His resurrection was demonstrated to be the Son of God. Not in the baptism of water only, as some who deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh affirm, but in the water and in the blood. And, besides these two, there is the witness of the Spirit, who testifies to the glory of Christ, and whose witness is the Truth. Thus, then, there are three who bear witness to the truth of Christ's Sonship—the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one, bear the same testimony, and mutually support and confirm each other.

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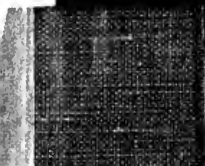
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