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PLAIN VILLAGE SERMONS

ON THE

LORD'S PRAYER,

AND

The Beatitudes.

BY

HENRY ALFORD, A. M.,

VICAR OF WYMESWOLD, LEICESTERSHIRE, AND LATE FELLOW OF TRINITY
COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

LONDON:

J. G. F. & J. RIVINGTON. NOTTINGHAM,
DEARDEN.

1846.

A D V E R T I S E M E N T .

THESE sermons, most of which have appeared in a series entitled "The Nottingham Church Tracts," are published in the humble and sincere hope, that they may, by their plainness and simplicity, (for they have no other pretension,) lead their readers to HIM, Who gave us this Divine Prayer, and spoke these Blessings. If any be by them induced to put on the spirit which was in HIM, and be thereby made partakers of these blessings, the Author's purpose will have been abundantly answered.

Wymeswold, December 4th, 1846.

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On the Lord's Prayer.

SERMON I.

“CONTINUING INSTANT IN PRAYER.”—*Rom. xii. 12.*

IF there be one duty which makes more frequent or more urgent calls upon a Christian than any other, it is that of *prayer*. Any one who has entered in earnest upon the divine life, will not be long before he perceives this. As a natural man, indeed, he owes a debt to his good and gracious God, which he can never acknowledge often enough, or be too mindful of; he is also dependent on God every day for every thing, being merely the creature of His hands, to do with as He thinks fit. What then can be more proper or more seemly, than, if for these reasons only, to fall down before the Lord his Maker, and while he acknowledges himself to be one of the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand, to beg for a continuance of that upholding care which has hitherto preserved him? So that, if this were all—if the air which we breathe, and the raiment which clothes us, and the food which we eat day by day, were all we received at God's hands, common gratitude would require that we should thank Him for it; and a common sense of our dependence on Him, that we should request the continuance of it. But we are not alone in the world—God has placed each of us here, surrounded by others of the same form and blood with himself; He has appointed that each of us should be brought into the world, not by a sudden and particular creation from Himself, but by the means of others on whom we are im-

mediately dependent: and thus we find ourselves, as soon as we can discern good from evil, placed in a situation in which we have many duties to fulfil towards those about us, which duties continually increase as we grow in years: and it has pleased His good Providence, that those towards whom we owe these duties should also be the persons to whom we are most attached, and from whose society we derive the greatest pleasure. Here then, again, is a mercy which requires at our hands a distinct acknowledgement—and a duty, to whose fulfilment finding ourselves inadequate, we are led to look to a higher source for support to enable us and give us strength. But yet more than this might be gathered from looking at us merely as the creatures of God's providence. If we cast our eyes around us, we plainly see that those who best fulfil the duties which are required of them by their stations in life, are not always the most prosperous; that evil men are often permitted to obtain the mastery and oppress the righteous. We also may see, that frequently the more the righteous are brought low and in misery, the clearer does their righteous dealing shew itself, and the more are they purified. Hence we learn to conclude, that worldly goods and prosperity are not the great objects of desire or of prayer—that we have something within us which is better than they, and which they are only employed as the means of trying, and preparing for something after this life. Hence we are led to suppose, that our chief care should be about our *souls*, that superior part of us which is better than the things about us. Here then is a fresh set of duties laid upon us, and a far more difficult one than any of the former; and a mercy also conferred upon us, a treasure committed to us, far more precious than the others were: and both of these call upon us for continual acts of drawing near unto God—the one for help, the other for gratitude's sake. Therefore, if this were all, if we merely knew ourselves as the creatures of God's pro-

vidence, according to what we have seen, the duty of prayer would be more and more urgent upon us, the more we came to know of our state and circumstances. Every fresh discovery of God's dealings with us and those around us, would open to us new mercies, and new duties arising in consequence of them; and thus, the more knowledge we had, the more occasion should we have to seek God—both to acknowledge His mercies and to seek His assistance. Now add to all this the sense which we must have that our thoughts and actions very frequently are in opposition to God—that we must be offending Him continually—which would lead us to Him to obtain pardon for the past and strength for the time to come, and would not allow us to trust to ourselves, but in our actions, as well as our being, to see our dependence upon Him; and you will see, upon looking back upon what has been said, the great force with which this duty of prayer presses on us, considered merely as in a natural state, with no revelation from God. Mind, I do not now speak of the difficulties which would attend prayer in this case, only because I am at present engaged in shewing you the *duty* of it, and arguing, that if our only grounds for it were God's mercies of providence, they would be powerful enough to engage us to it continually. And why am I doing this? That I may beg of you to bear this in mind, while I go on to shew you on what other grounds the command to be instant in prayer is made to us.—If we could conceive a person not only created into life and being by God, but after that creation, undergoing another birth equally wonderful with his former one—so that, as by that he was brought from being nothing to be that human form which he now is, so by this fresh birth, he is brought from being the man that he now is, into a life which is as glorious in comparison to his former one, as that was in comparison to not being at all; would not such a person have the claims on him to acknowledge God's mercies, and to pray

for sustenance in this new life, vastly increased? If we suppose, also, that with this new being a great accession of knowledge had been made to him, that many ways of God which were before dark to him, were now made clear—will it not be the case, that as we saw before the duty of prayer increase as knowledge of God's ways increased; so now also, by this fresh knowledge, it will press more forcibly on the newly-enlightened person? Suppose also, that in this new life the way of prayer was made clear, the difficulties removed, the person brought into a state in which he could have constant access to God, and a promise that his requests should always be heard and considered; would not this also greatly increase the obligation? In short, if the man were in his former life bound to pray, will he not now, in his fresh life, be tenfold more bound?

I need hardly say that I have now been describing the state of all who hear me. We, my brethren, are all baptized members of the Church of Christ. When we were children we were brought to the laver of regeneration, and then and there were solemnly admitted into a fellowship with the sufferings of Christ, and made parts of His spouse and His body. The joyful words were said over each of us, "We yield Thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased Thee to regenerate this infant with Thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for Thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into Thy Holy Church." Here is our new life, our new state of duty, mercy, and obligation. God who brought us out of a state of nothingness and death into the world, hath also brought us out of the death of sin, and caused us to be born into a life of righteousness. Now, therefore, let us turn and see on what grounds the duty of prayer presses on us. *First*, we need continually sustaining in this our new life; as in our natural life, if it were not for God's preservation of us we should be overtaken by death, so in this, our spiritual life, He

must continually hold us up, or we shall become those who have a name to live and yet are dead. For this, then, we must continually be having recourse to Him for supplies of His grace; for as His providence was the upholding power in the former life, so is His grace in that into which we are born,—by grace we were brought into it, and by grace we stand in it. And connected with this, is the duty of giving Him thanks who hath thus begotten us anew in Christ Jesus,—thanks, as far as we are able, proportioned to the greatness of the blessing,—earnest, constant, and unfeigned. These, then, constitute our first matter for prayer in our Christian state, and I cannot sum them up better than in the words which you all know,—“ I heartily thank my heavenly Father that He hath brought me into this state of salvation through Jesus Christ our Saviour. And I pray unto God to give me His grace that I may continue in the same unto my life's end.” The *second* ground for an increased obligation to prayer in the Christian life is, that we are, by it, brought into new relationships and new duties towards others, which circumstance, as before, calls for a special acknowledgment of mercy, and a special petition for help. In this state, God is our reconciled Father; we had before fathers of our flesh, and we were in subjection to them; now, we are brought into subjection to the Father of spirits; and all that we owed to them, reverence, love, obedience, more deeply do we owe to our new Father, in proportion as the new life to which of His own will He hath begotten us, is of a higher kind and more glorious than our earthly one. For all this we need His continual help, and because this help is promised to us constantly, and we may always have access to His glorious presence, we are therefore bound to yield Him most humble and hearty thanks for this His fatherly care towards us. And our mother in the spirit is the Church of

Christ; in and from her we received our life, and by her we are fed and nourished, and with her we shall be presented in the great day of joy, when she shall say, "Behold! I and the children whom God hath given me." This mercy we are bound to acknowledge in prayer, in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of His people when they are assembled together in His name; where also help is to be sought to perform all that we owe to her, help to value her ordinances, help to keep her commands, help to preserve her purity, help to maintain her unity. And not only are we her sons and daughters, but we are parts of her, and as such are the spouse of Christ;—and here is a new relationship, we are united to Him as our head and Husband, and He loves us and looks favourably on us,—here is one more mercy to be acknowledged;—and His command to us is, *be thou faithful*:—here is our duty and need of help. Our brethren in the new life are those who are brought into it like ourselves, whoever they may be in the world. We are refreshed and encouraged by their counsel and presence, and we owe them brotherly love and kindness,—a mercy and an obligation requiring prayer also in this case. *Thirdly*, we are bound to pray in our Christian life, to help forward the work of our sanctification. An active progress in holiness is required of all who are baptized into Christ, and there can be no progress in holiness without a frequent communion with God, without realising His presence and setting Him at our right hand. This is our preparation for our state of glory, and, therefore, will be much occupied in the company, as far as we can now enjoy it, of Him who is to be the delight and crown of that state. And the more we advance in this blessed progress, the more we see the fruits of faith springing up in our lives and thoughts, the more we are bound to render humble and hearty thanks to Him of whom cometh every good thought and deed. So here again are our

thanksgivings and our petitions for help requiring us to be instant in prayer. *Next*, we are called in our state of salvation constantly into the presence of God to confess and bewail our manifold sins and transgressions against Him. The carnal promptings of our mortal bodies are perpetually drawing us back from knowing our high vocation of God in Christ Jesus, and we are tempted by our great spiritual adversary to disbelieve and distrust our state in Him, and to look to ourselves, as if it were a state that we had to put ourselves into, or to get admitted to. All these backslidings and shortcomings from the simple truth as it is in Jesus need to be often and deeply bewailed before God, and solemnly repented of, as unworthy of our state in Christ and a denying of the Lord that bought us. Now besides all these calls to prayer on us as members of Christ, there is another which should and may be as powerful as any,—nay, the most so of all,—but which requires, in order to its exercise, active and unceasing practice of the requirements of the rest. It is the duty of giving God thanks and praise for all His glorious character as shewn forth to us in His word. “We give Thee thanks for Thy great glory,” are the words we use in our Communion Service after we have fed on Christ, have been admitted within the veil of His flesh, have drunk of His blood, and have become possessed and filled with holy things. The Church, the spouse of the Heavenly King, loves Him for Himself, and every member of that Church will not allow His love to God to stop with gratitude for the blessings he has received, but will be drawn out in active love to God as He is in Himself, in all His wonderful manifestations of love. And this love will call him to continual communion with God,—to continual searchings of His word with prayer, that he may trace His footsteps and the wonders of His hand wherever he turns.

So many, so powerful, are the Christian's calls to prayer; and surely he who neglects them, or thinks lightly of them, can hardly deserve the name. We are apt to attach pleasant thoughts to the sound of the bells that call us to these our public prayers; and I have heard of some who, I fear, cared little for prayer,—that could not bear to stay at home when the bells were going for Church; but in the ears of the man who loves His Saviour and values His grace and ready help, bells are always sounding to prayer. When He rises before the daylight to His work, before he leaves his chamber, he hears the call within him, 'Come to prayer;' when in his daily hours evil thoughts rise in him, or ungodly companions tempt him, that sweet sound comes to him again, as it were upon the wind, 'Come to prayer;' when he meets his family safe by God's mercy in the evening, there is the well known chime in the midst of them, 'Come to prayer;' and when he is preparing to lay himself down in the confidence of sleep, since God will not remove, the same welcome call is still at his heart's door, "Come to prayer!" By prayer he lives, in prayer he hopes to die. Prayer is his only cordial, his surest medicine, his only key to his best treasure. His Saviour spent whole nights in prayer, and he prays that he may be able to pray like Him.

And now, with all this before you, will any soul in this Church go home, and live from day to day and night to night without a prayer or thought of God? I fear many will—for I know too well the hardness of the human heart, to think that any thing I can say will break it, unless the powerful arm of God descend to further His Word and give efficacy to it. All of you who really care for the souls of others, here is another great call to prayer on you—pray that what we speak in God's name, may in His name be received, and by His Spirit rendered fruitful.

You have heard now the *duty* of prayer—how it presses on

us as men, but how much more forcibly, as we are Christians and inheritors of heaven. I hope, if God spare us, to set before you next Sunday the efficacy of prayer: and both these discourses will be a preparation to explain to you the divine prayer which our Saviour has given us.

Meanwhile I earnestly beseech you, as one who very deeply cares for your souls, to lay to heart what I have said. Let those who pray be more constant and more earnest in prayer, remembering how it is their refuge and strength in all circumstances; and let those who do not pray—I tremble to say it—seriously consider what an awfully dangerous state they are falling into,—no less than that of rejecting the state of salvation into which they are brought by Christ. Let them begin this very day this their bounden, but neglected, duty, with humble acknowledgment of their grievous omission, and cries for forgiveness and grace for the time to come.

S E R M O N I I .

“ASK, AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN YOU.”—*St. Matt.* vii. 7.

I ENDEAVOURED last Sunday morning to prove to you, and impress upon you, the duty of continuing instant in prayer: how it bears upon us as men, as the creatures of God's providence; but how much more forcibly it bears on us as His creatures of grace and the new birth, inasmuch as our obligations to be fulfilled are greater, our causes of thankfulness more numerous and of a higher order, and consequently our need of assistance greater also. Now I need but refer to what I then said, to make it clear, that even if prayer were nothing but the performance of a required duty, if it were attended with no results, but were merely a simple act of obedience to God, it would not lose any of its claims to our observance, but would retain them all in full force.

But now I am to enter on another branch of my subject, and to shew you that not only are we bound to pray because God has required it of us, but also because our own best interests demand it; that not only is prayer the performance of a duty and an act of obedience, but an appointed means of acquiring blessings from the Giver of all good. And then surely, if I can make this manifest to you, the ties which bind us to God in this matter will be incalculably strengthened, and it will appear not only to be our bounden duty, but also our chief interest to continue instant in prayer. I have chosen to head our meditation on this subject with a direct promise of our Blessed Redeemer, in Whom alone and through Whom any

prayers can be received by God, "Ask, and it shall be given you;" because he who knows what is in man, knows also the mind of God; and therefore has a full right and power to make such a promise; because He is our great Head and our Master, and our common bond of union, in whom we live and move and have our being; and therefore we are bound to receive such a promise from Him in full confidence of its performance. Now I am fully aware that at the very outset I shall have to meet an objection which the natural heart is apt to raise against prayer. Some of you will say to me, you tell us much about the duty of prayer and its efficacy:—but you never can make me think that anything we can say will persuade God one way or the other—what He sees fit to give us for our souls' good He will give us, and what He sees fit to withhold from us He will withhold, whether we tell it to Him or not. Now I mention this objection, because it is one that I have very often heard made, not because I wish to suggest objections to you. You remember in my last discourse on this subject, that I spoke to you of two distinct births we have undergone, and two distinct lives that we have been brought into—and I shewed you how much likeness there was between our wants and our duties in each of them; only that our spiritual birth and the life which follows it, was of a higher order than the other, accompanied with wants which lie deeper in our nature and duties which are more difficult to perform. I shewed you that the upholding power is God's providence in our natural life, and His grace in our Spiritual life, and that so near is their resemblance that for all the circumstances and operations in the first, we may find corresponding ones in the second.

Now let us see how your objection will apply to our duties as creatures of God's *providence*. You say, that God will give us what He thinks fit, and withhold what He sees bad

for us, whether we take any means for it or not. How is it then that we see men from morning till night labouring for their daily bread? Why do not they sit still in idleness and trust that God will bring it to them? but we see they do not—and I suspect that we should think the person beside himself who did. You see then that your objection is one which does not influence men in their actions; if you go and tell a man it is of no use for him to work, that God will take care of him, he will not listen to you, but will rise up to-morrow morning and go to his work as usual. Now in the life into which you were admitted when you were brought to be baptized, as we have said, your wants lie deeper—your food is of a sort more difficult to be obtained; and you yourselves can surely furnish me with the conclusion of my sentence,—*your labour must be therefore greater*. Prayer in your spiritual life answers precisely to labour in your natural one. In the same way as God has appointed in the order of His *providence* that you should go and labour with your hands and receive your bodily sustenance on account of your labour, exactly so has He ordained in the dispensation of His *grace* that you should go and pray and receive your spiritual sustenance on account of your prayer. If it be madness to neglect the labour in the one case, it is madness also to neglect the prayer in the other: and so much the greater madness of the two in proportion as your spiritual life is more important, more worthy your care, more glorious than your natural one. Now God is not a master who defrauds His servants; He who said “*the labourer is worthy of his hire,*” also hath said, “*ask, and it shall be given you.*” If then men, being evil, yet give to those who labour for them the meat that perisheth, much more shall our heavenly Father give to them that ask Him the meat that endureth unto everlasting life. Having shewn to you then the reasonableness of prayer; that it is just as reasonable to

pray as *Christians*, as it is to labour for our daily food as men ; and that we may just as reasonably look for an answer to prayer in the one case, as for that which our labour has procured in the other : we will now go on to notice a few of the methods in which our souls are fed and refreshed by prayer.

First, then, it is a direct method of fetching down blessings from God, "ask, and it shall be given to you." But then take good heed how you understand this ; remember, it is spoken to you as members of the spiritual life, as branches of the vine, Christ—as persons whose anxieties and whose requests are concerning the wants and necessities of that spiritual life. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name," says Christ, "I will do it ;" that is, whatsoever ye shall ask as members and parts of Me ; as named by the same Name that I am named with, I will do for you ; or, as it is elsewhere exprest, it shall be done for you of My Father which is in heaven. Now this is a point which requires particular explanation, and I would illustrate it in this way. It is very clear that in our natural lives we all labour for the means of preserving life and making it better and more prosperous. We have all a pretty clear notion of the sort of things which will tend to do this ; such as increased means, better fare, and the like. And we never hear of such a thing as a man labouring for the means of *destroying life*,—it is impossible he should, unless he be a madman, who cannot distinguish what is good for him from that which is evil. And if we should see such an one, we should not furnish him with the destructive materials surely, but should place him under the care of others who know better than he does what is his interest. Now, although we are not so blind as to labour for what will tend to destroy our natural lives, we are very often so blind as to pray for what would destroy our spiritual life. "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

In being brought into the light of Christ, we are like persons led out of a dark place into excessive brightness,—our eyes are dazzled, and we cannot discern things clearly, our state is one above our nature, and no wonder then if we go wrong in it and stumble. Therefore it is that we are very apt to pray for things which are hurtful to our spiritual lives. But yet you say it is promised, “Ask, and it shall be given you;” very true, but do you not clearly see by what follows, to whom, and with what meaning, this is spoken? Our Saviour goes on to say, “What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will give him a stone? or if he ask a fish will give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him.” You see all the things spoken of are good things, things necessary to the support and well-being of the natural life in one case, and the spiritual one in the other. Prayer, then, is a direct means of fetching down blessings from God, and as such it never has failed and never can fail, for nothing can be called a blessing which does not conduce to our good. Observe the direct promises which God has given respecting this point. He has declared He will be found of them that seek Him with all their heart, that He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him; He will hear their cry and save them: that they who seek Him shall not want any good thing—that whatsoever we ask in prayer, believing, we shall receive. There is nothing beyond the reach of prayer: even if it be in heaven in God’s treasure house, prayer can ascend and fetch it. Are we distressed, outwardly or spiritually? Prayer shall relieve us. Are we in need? Prayer shall supply us. Are we in sorrow or sadness? Prayer shall comfort us. Are we in doubt and darkness of mind? Prayer shall satisfy us. Are we in temptation? Prayer shall help and strengthen us.

Secondly, Prayer is an instrument by which good is worked in us. Besides the direct answer promised and vouchsafed to prayer, it has a beneficial and blessed effect upon ourselves; God by it conveys spiritual light into our minds. When we retire with God into our closets alone, and lay bare our souls to the bright shining of His countenance, which is ten thousand times more glorious than the sun, how can they be otherwise than overflowed with a flood of that heavenly light—yea, and warmed too with the comfort of His presence.

By prayer all holy dispositions of soul and resolutions of practice are nourished and encouraged, all pious affections excited and quickened. By prayer alone can the love of God be kept alive and vigorous in our hearts, or a constant reverence and awe of Him, and sense of His presence maintained: every moment stolen from prayer is a step back from God's love and fear. By prayer alone can our faith be strengthened and exercised, or our hope enlivened; or, that taste for and relish of divine things begotten and kept up, by which our thoughts are purified, and our lives sanctified. In prayer alone can strength be acquired to subdue our bad inclinations, to restrain our sensual appetites, to compress our irregular passions. In short, prayer is the great bulwark against sin, and safeguard of our spiritual life.

Thirdly, Prayer is a most high privilege and advantage to us. The being allowed to fly to so great a God and so kind a Father, to unbosom all our cares, all our wants, all our sorrows, all our joys to Him, to Him who knows all that is best for us, who is our only true and perfect friend,—how blessed a thing it is, and of how great a price should it be to us. We are apt to think those in a high and enviable situation, who sometimes have the ear, and enjoy the presence of kings and princes; but what is this compared to our condition, who always are allowed the audience and presence of the great King of all the world?

In Scripture, in history, in our own experience and memory, examples are not wanting of the efficacy of prayer. By prayer, Abraham, when the Lord spoke to him of the destruction of Sodom, prevailed that for the sake of ten righteous the city should be spared. By prayer, Moses, when Israel was sore vexed by their enemies, got for them the victory from God, his hands being held up in prayer till the going down of the sun. By prayer, Joshua obtained that the sun should stand still till the enemies of the Lord were overtaken and punished. By prayer, Hannah, when she poured out her heart in great bitterness of soul, obtained a son from the Lord. By prayer, Elijah, a man subject to like passions as we are, earnestly besought that it might not rain; and it rained not upon the earth by the space of three years and six months: and he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. By prayer, Elisha raised up the son of the Shunamite when he stretched himself over him and said, "O Lord, I beseech Thee, let this child's soul come into him again." By prayer, David, when he had grievously sinned in the matter of Uriah, besought God, and the Lord forgave the iniquity of his sin. And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Hezekiah, and Manasseh, and Daniel, and Jonah,—who through prayer obtained deliverance from the jaws of death, were brought out of prison and distress, were preserved from the mouths of the lions, and were shewn things to come.

Need I, after recounting so many instances of answered prayer, repeat to you the promise, "Ask, and ye shall receive," and press upon you, as I did before, the duty, so now, the exceeding benefit and blessed effects of prayer? Need I tell you what a treasure you are throwing away by neglecting it—how you are despising your spiritual state of salvation in Christ, and going near to fall away from it, by thus omitting

to nourish it and improve it? Need I say how you are showing contempt of God, by not availing yourselves of the rich treasures which he has set before you?

Let prayer be your constant employ, your continual refuge. Draw near in faith, nothing doubting that what is asked in faith, shall surely be done for you of God. This is the way to shew that we believe in God—by going to him for supplies of grace and strength. This is the way to purify our hearts and lives; for we cannot long and frequently commune with God in prayer, while we incline unto wickedness with our hearts. In God's house, in your families, in your closets, this is your proper employment; and I conjure you, never let a possible opportunity pass, without presenting yourselves here in public before God,—and never let a day pass in which you have not, both in the midst of your families and in private, sought Him earnestly and faithfully for pardon for the past, and grace for time to come; and thanked Him for His mercies, which are every day renewed to us. Thus shall you be blessed in all your undertakings—and the more you pray here, the more glorious will be your joy, when there shall be no more prayer, but songs of praise for ever and ever.

S E R M O N I I I .

“AFTER THIS MANNER THEREFORE PRAY YE.”—*St. Matt. vi. 9.*

HAVING shewn you the duty of prayer, and its effects in procuring blessings from God, I proceed now to say something on the form and manner of making our requests before the throne of grace. Not as though the form or the manner were the principal matter to be considered, for God regards not the words but the heart: and the most laboured words are not acceptable to Him if the heart go not along with them; nay they are a mere mockery of Him, and are so far from pleasing Him, that the act of thus praying is sinful. But when the duty of praying has been explained, and the reasons which bind us to it have been laid before you, and when you have heard how great things the prayers of the faithful have been the means of accomplishing, you must be well aware, that the only exercise which can be called prayer is the opening and pouring out of the soul before God. And, bearing this well in mind, let us now go on to enquire what behaviour becomes us when we are doing this, and how it should be done. In the first place, the infinite majesty and power of Him whom we address, require that we should come before Him with humility and reverence. He is our God, we are His people: He our Creator, we His creatures: He our Shepherd, we the sheep of His pasture. When therefore we draw near to Him let this be in our minds, let our thoughts be concerning our dependence on Him and his power over us. He hath no delight in the multitude of offerings: He receives no benefit from our

adoration ; what He requires of us is that we should acknowledge Him and look up to Him for help and guidance. Therefore let all our behaviour, and even our outward posture and appearance, shew this feeling, that we are dependent creatures.— This would become us, even if we were innocent before Him, and had nothing to reproach ourselves with. But, besides being the work of His hands, there is another and a deeper cause why we should humble ourselves and be abased before Him ; we are not only His creatures, but rebellious and fallen creatures. He is holy and pure, above all defilement and blemish ; no thought of sin, none of the dark passions which reign in us ever approach the supreme light where He dwells : all sin is an abomination to the Lord. “ He putteth no trust in His servants, and He chargeth his angels with folly : how much less then in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before the moth ? ” In how many respects has sin separated between us and God—we were created glorious creatures, not subject to death and change ; but now we may take up the lamentation of the prophet, “ How is the gold become dim and the fine gold changed ! the crown is fallen from our heads, woe unto us that we have sinned, we are become subject to corruption, and cannot be justified in His sight. How can man be justified with God ? or how can he be clean that is born of woman ? behold even to the moon and it shineth not, and the stars are not pure in His sight ; how much less man that is a worm, and the son of man which is a worm ? ” When Job of old saw the glory and power of God, and the wonders of His works were laid open to him by the divine voice which there was no resisting, the presence of God struck him down and abased him, and he said, “ 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.” When Simon Peter had

seen the power of Christ, how that the creatures of the great deep obeyed him, his own weakness and defilement struck forcibly on him; he trembled in the presence of divinity and fell at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." These should then be our feelings on approaching the divine Majesty—a sense of our own sinfulness and wretchedness, and of the high and holy Being whom we are addressing—an act of humility, and renouncing of ourselves, and confessing our sins to Him. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit—a broken and a contrite heart, O God, wilt not thou despise." Thus saith the High and Holy One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." This was the spirit in which Abraham prayed to God, "Behold, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes. Thus did holy Daniel begin his prayer, "O Lord, righteousness belongeth to Thee, but unto us confusion of face." This spirit then becomes us, as we are God's fallen creatures: but thanks be to the eternal mercy of our gracious Father, we are not his *fallen* creatures only, for then would our approach to Him be cut off, for He can have no fellowship with unrighteousness. We are also His *redeemed* creatures, His reconciled children in Christ; He hath made a covenant with us, and we are His people. Through the death and resurrection of our Saviour a way of access is opened for us to the Father; and therefore feeling ourselves such, we must draw near with a thankful remembrance of that His so great and unspeakable mercy, and with lively faith come boldly to the throne of grace in His name, who is our great Redeemer, and ever maketh intercession for us. The feeling produced by our state as *sinner*s is one of abasement and contrition; that produced by our state as *sinner*s *reconciled* to

God by Christ, is one of thanksgiving, deep and heartfelt. Thus we find these feelings coupled together by the Apostle,—“ In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, making your requests known unto God.” Coming then before Him with this mind and these impressions, with what words are we to address Him, and how to express our wishes with an acknowledgment of His majesty and our weakness, of His purity and our sinfulness, of His covenant mercies and our relation to Him in Christ? Surely if it behoves us to weigh our words when we come before an earthly prince, much more should we be careful and keep a watch over our lips, when we address the King of Heaven; and therefore He has told us by His servant Solomon, in Eccles. v. 2. “ Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.”

It is a great mistake to suppose that we want many and various words to express our wants to God: our spiritual necessities are almost always the same; and the spirit of prayer is often lit up in our hearts by the use of well known and accustomed words, more than by striving to supply them ourselves, from any present feeling. For not to mention other hindrances, so apt are our feelings and our sense of spiritual need to deceive us, so apt are we to feel least disposed to open our hearts to God at those very times when we would most willingly do so, and to be most bound down and riveted to the earth when we would fain rise nearest heaven,—that to have our wants ready made out for us, to be able to avail ourselves of the prayers of others who were in like need with ourselves, is frequently a great help to devotion; and though at first the words may fall dead from our lips unaccompanied by the thoughts, yet soon will the heavenly fire descend upon our sacrifice, and cause the flame to ascend up before God. In

mercy to these our infirmities, our blessed Saviour has been pleased to teach His disciples how to pray, giving them a form to use, and saying "after this manner pray ye." As man like ourselves, He knew all our weaknesses, He was able to succour us who are tempted, having Himself been tempted. He knew what prayer was, for He retired into the lonely mountain to pray, and spent whole nights in fervent devotion; and in His agony the night before His crucifixion, He prayed as never man prayed. And as God He knows our wants—He can see into the depths of our hearts—and those necessities which we attribute to the wrong causes, and for the relief of which we should ask amiss, He can trace to their right sources, and inform us how best we may unfold them, and beg a remedy of them of God. Happy indeed are those petitioners to whom the King Himself prescribes the form of their petition, and promises He will grant it; but such is our case, for the sum and substance of those things which we have need of has been prescribed to us by God himself, and He has promised to hear the prayer of those that call upon Him faithfully. This form of prayer which we call the Lord's prayer, I purpose, if it be His will to spare us, to explain to you in some of my future discourses. I will introduce this explanation with a few general remarks on it, which may be profitable to point out its use and its peculiar excellency. First, then, I would have you notice its shortness—"When ye pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathen do," was the command of our Saviour, "for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking—Be ye not like them, for your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him." And He on another occasion blames the Pharisees, who for a pretence made long prayers: and He has accordingly given us a prayer which, while it comprehends every thing our hearts can desire for our spiritual or temporal welfare, is comprised in a few short sentences. The

man who can truly pray these, shall be more blessed of God and comforted in his own soul, than he who speaks ten thousand words in the unknown tongue of formal and hypocritical worship.

Next observe its simplicity. There are in it no ornaments of speech, no useless or difficult language—nothing but what the veriest child among us can understand and heartily join in. God wants not to be worshipped with the pomp and pride of our carnal acquirements; “When the poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I, the Lord, will hear them, I, the God of Israel will not forsake them.” Let then those be of good courage who have no laboured words to go to God with; let them remember that the Lord delighteth not in words, but in the simple putting forth of the desires of the heart; and let them cry unto God, assured that He will hear and deliver them, though their speech may be rude, and their desires ill expressed. My dear Brethren, whatever difference circumstances may have made among men in our estimation, there is very little in the eye of God. He who prays loud and long, and makes much of what he calls the gift of prayer, only differs from the little child who lisps his morning and evening prayer on his mother's knees, by more sorrows, more sins, and more pride; and well would it be for many rich and mighty, if, from their abundance and refinement, they sent up to God petitions as humble and sincere as the cries of the poor; at any rate, if you have no words to speak with when you come before God, if your carnal minds and your spiritual enemy have so blinded your hearts that you cannot find any spiritual wants to bring to Him, there is this prayer of our Saviour ever ready; you have been taught it in your youth, you have joined in it with His people, many times, it may be, you have passed the words through your

lips when your hearts were far away, let it be your endeavour for once to *pray* it from your heart. Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh unto you; and when, not only in His appointed way but in His appointed words, you seek Him, when you endeavour to frame your mind to the pattern of those petitions for wants which He knows all of us possess, surely, if no other effect follow, you will have your spiritual blindness cured, your inward disease will be laid open to you, and you will find Him who has promised that He will be found of them that seek Him. And in your endeavours to express your peculiar personal wants to Him, to acknowledge His mercies to you individually, and to beg for a continuance of them, let this prayer be your pattern and model; imitate its simplicity, its order of address to God, its proportions; and the nearer you approach them, if I mistake not, the more you will find those blessed effects to result from prayer on your hearts, of which I have before spoken to you,—effects of strengthened faith, fresh kindled love, livelier hope, and stedfast looking for of glory. I have often thought that when we come to the other side of the water, and look back upon our lives, as I think we shall, with memory of past things strengthened and renewed, and see all the times of intercourse with heaven which were vouchsafed to us, all God's ordinances of prayer, reading the Word, and the holy Sacraments, like so many bright spots in our course; though there may be many times when we mounted higher in spirit, and came nearer to the angels, and had nearer sights of the glory of Christ and the throne of God, this little prayer of "Our Father," will appear to be the instrument with which we oftenest took hold on God, and drew down most plentiful showers of spiritual refreshment. Other seasons come less frequently, and require more preparation, and a certain raising of our weak souls

and putting them into frame, and as the occasion was above us, so we are apt to sink below it afterwards, and many drops of grace fall outside the fertile places of our hearts and work no deliverance ; but this gift of our Lord is like the daily light and common air, when we rise up it is with us, when we lie down it is with us still, it is said over us at the font, and in the grave, in the festive day, at the altar of marriage, and when we are visited on our beds of sickness ; in our solemn services it bears its part, and when we go up to join the blessed communion of our Master, His prayer is still our prayer. May He grant that we who use it so often with our lips, may as often join in it with our hearts, and become partakers of the blessings which it asks for.

S E R M O N I V.

“OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME.
THY KINGDOM COME. THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH AS IT IS IN
HEAVEN.”—*St. Matt.* vi. 9, 10.

WE are now come to the beginning, the address, of that prayer which our Saviour has left us for our use. The first thing to be noticed in it is the name by which we are taught to approach God: that of Father. When we come before Him, we are not advised to begin with an address suited to His glorious perfection, one which recounts what He is in Himself, though this might tend to impress us with holy fear and reverence for the great Being into whose presence we are come; but we are rather taught to call Him by some name which expresses His relation to us, to bring down as it were His glory and majesty and mix them up with a little consideration of humanity, and the great earthly family of our common and weak nature. By the opening word “Father,” we bind as it were God and ourselves together with the cords of love and relationship. It might be well for angels and spirits made perfect to stand forth and say: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty;” but for us who are infirm and sinful, and troubled with the voice of His wrath, and turned into dust at His displeasure, it is gracious and kind of Him to allow us to approach Him by a dearer name, one which ensures us mercy and protection—“Our Father”—as much as to say—though we are rebellious yet we are Thine, though we are sinful children yet we *are* Thy *children*, though Thou slayest us, yet will we trust in Thee. How compassionate and consider-

ate to us was our master Jesus, who has taught us to call our glorious and holy Lord God by the first word we learnt to pronounce, the word which brought relief to our little wants, and got for us kind smiling looks and fond embraces when we were yet babes on the breast; and to connect our thoughts of the great Ruler of heaven and earth, with that earthly parent who has worked for us and fed us before we were able to do either for ourselves. And because to call God my Father; as a single helpless child of man to stretch forth the hand to the Holy One might have appeared to us almost presumptuous, and made us shrink from going to Him, He has spared us this and put us all in company, all the brothers and sisters of this great family; He has allowed us to shelter ourselves in the crowd of petitioners from the too great splendour of the Divine majesty—so that when even in our closets we make our prayer to Him alone, we do not say, My Father, but “Our Father,” and then we should think of our thousands and thousands of fellow creatures who want blessings as well as we; and we should think of ourselves not as of some great ones who are permitted to make our wants known to God, but only as one of the common inhabitants of the earth—sharing the flesh and blood of others, and having the same wants as they have. Lord, look upon me, I am one of those whom thou hast begotten. But who is this Father, and where is His dwelling-place? Where must we go to His presence? He is in heaven—and where is heaven? We know not—He has not told us where His dwelling-place is, but He has said that He is every where present and sees all things—that He can hear us when we call upon Him—that He is not far off from every one of us. And this unknown and mysterious word “heaven,” is used to remind us of His exaltation above us, and of the frame of mind in which we should approach Him. Lest these words, “Our Father,” should seem of too familiar an import, and bring down

our conception of Him whom we address too near to the level of flesh and blood, we are reminded that He is in heaven—high above the earth, high above and exceeding in power and beauty all the things that we admire most and fear most, high above all that we see and feel, and are conversant with—and far removed from any spot of sin or impurity. These words, “which art in heaven,” should withdraw him who prays them from earth, and fasten him to the mansions above; should introduce him into the immediate presence of God sitting on His throne, and yet our Father encircled by the heavenly powers, and yet calling His children round Him and permitting them to come near to Him. And in this spirit—as having now made our entrance and being before God’s throne, and introduced to make our petition, we are struck with a sense of His great glory and His wonderful power and majesty; and we forget our own wants with which we came, and our thoughts are about His Holy Name—we become very zealous for the Lord God of Hosts; and our first prayer is, that He would cause His Name to be hallowed—that He would make it a name esteemed holy among men, and had in reverence: that He would subdue His enemies who will not have Him to reign over them, and make His name glorious to the ends of the world. Wonderful things are said of the name of God in His word—His name of Jehovah was only gradually revealed to the patriarchs; Abraham knew it not, and the Jews never pronounced it,—nor did our Saviour Himself when on earth, in all that we have recorded of Him. Let it then be hallowed—and let that name which shall fill the songs of the redeemed to all eternity, be held sacred and revered by us, the creatures of dust—let it not be unmeaningly and thoughtlessly uttered by us in our common talk, but when ever it passes our lips, let us call to mind whom we are mentioning—that we are speaking of Him whose name is excellent in all the world, and who has set His glory above the

heavens. Next to our petition for the hallowing of His name, is that for the coming of His kingdom. We have sent our thoughts up to the power and majesty of our Father in heaven, and the happy and peaceful reign of His perfect government there, and we long for the time when His kingdom shall also be established on earth. His kingdom in one sense is come—for the Lord Jesus, when he ascended up from the grave and overcame the powers of darkness and death, received the kingdom—as He declared “All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth,” all things are delivered into His hands, and He is the Judge of the earth and its ruler. But in another sense it is not yet come, for we see not all things yet put under His feet—evil men and evil practices yet lift their heads amongst us, and there is war, and envy, and jealousy, and bloodshed in the earth. But we are told in the Word of God of a glorious time when all these things shall have ceased ; when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall learn war any more,—when they shall not hurt nor destroy in all God’s holy mountain—when the knowledge of Him and the fear of His Name, shall be widely spread over the earth. This is the kingdom we pray for when we beseech Him to accomplish the number of His elect, and hasten His glorious kingdom—for this is the kingdom in which we shall see Him as He is, and enjoy His kingly presence, and serve Him as we would—freed from all the hindrances of our mortal flesh. And in praying for the coming of this, we pray that all things may be put down and done away, which oppose themselves to it—and among the chief of these the imaginations of our own carnal and rebellious hearts, which exalt themselves against God—we pray that these may be brought into subjection to His rule, and that we may be obedient subjects of His kingdom. Moreover we declare by praying that God’s kingdom may come, our willingness and resolution to do every thing that lies in our power to promote its spread and increase ; and both

by our example to glorify our God, and by our words and influence to set forward among men His fear, and obedience to His laws. For, love to His kingdom is surely best shewn in being ourselves loyal and peaceable subjects of that kingdom, and walking in His commandments and ordinances blameless.

And now having prayed for the increase of God's kingdom and for the arrival of the complete and blessed state of it upon earth, we request a yet higher thing, one which shews a yet nearer apprehension and sight of His glory and of the service of those blessed beings who are about Him where He is. "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." In heaven God's holy will is perfectly and entirely done. No murmur against Him is ever heard there; no refusal to serve Him in His appointed way, but at His bidding His holy angels go every way to perform His pleasure, and we pray that it may be so on earth also. Now what does this little petition "Thy will be done" imply? It implies praise of God's dealings—it testifies that we join in our hearts that blessed company in the Revelation who sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, "Great and wonderful are Thy works O Lord God Almighty: just and true are Thy ways O King of saints." We renounce our own judgment of the things that happen, as far as they are at variance with the determination of God's wisdom; and humbly acquiesce in all His providences and ordinances as best for us and for all. We also express our desire that as God's will is perfectly done in heaven, so here on earth, those who oppose themselves to the gracious design of God, may have their hearts turned and all things subjected to it, that His holy will may have free course and be the rule of all. It also implies a prayer that God would enable us to perform willingly whatever He requires of us, perfecting us in His will as the Apostle says, and working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight: that He will enable us to bear con-

tentedly whatever He is pleased to lay upon us, and completely to give up our own wills unto His will, and only have that and none of our own. We pray for a contented and cheerful demeanour, in that state of life in which He has been pleased to place us, and a quiet earnest endeavour to do the duties of it: for a submissive patience and meekness in all adversities which it pleases Him to bring upon us, and grace to receive them as coming from Him and according to His blessed will; in short to live continually as in God's hands, to do what He chooses with us, and to acknowledge His wisdom, His justice and goodness in all His dealings with us; according to that saying of Eli, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good:" of David, "Behold here I am, let Him do unto me as seemeth good unto Him:" of Job, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord:" and of our Lord himself in His severest trial, "Father, not My will but Thine be done." Oh that we could utter these words with the warmth and with the sincerity with which they were uttered by Him. Many times to-day have they past our lips; but has our heart truly felt or wished to feel (which is the same in God's sight,) bowed down to His holy will and resigned into His hands? And have we said them with a determination that by us at least His will shall be done, and that we will do our endeavour to promote that which we pray for, the doing of it in earth as it is done in heaven? When we prayed "Thy kingdom come," did we so with clear ideas of what we were seeking, with a going forth of the heart unto God, and above all with an inward wish and determination to ourselves, to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness?" When we said "Hallowed be Thy name," had we a just conception of what we were saying and to whom we were saying it—had we really that wish which we professed for the honour

of God's name ardently implanted in us? and as in the former cases, did we say the words with a devout intention of hallowing it ourselves; of not speaking, or thinking, or suffering others to speak or think lightly of that sacred name? And when we said "Our Father," were our hearts drawn out in a sense of our relationship to God, and our state as His children by creation and by redemption, and in love and reverence to Him for His mercies in Christ abundantly bestowed upon us? And did His dwelling place—heaven, with its glories, pass before us when we called Him our Father in heaven, and affect us with a deep sense of our weakness and unworthiness to approach Him?

Brethren, to be mockers of God is an awful thing at any time, and in whatever form it shews itself: but when in prayer itself we mock Him, and when that prayer is the one He Himself gave us to sum up our wants in, out of compassion to our weakness, surely the sin becomes aggravated ten-fold. "But be not deceived; God is not mocked; for what a man soweth that shall he also reap:" when we thus come before God it is not Him but our own souls that we mock; by depriving them of the great benefit and privilege of having these feelings raised towards God, by depriving them of the inestimable benefits which fervent effectual prayer procures for us.

Observe the order and pattern which this prayer sets us in our other addresses to God. The first petitions, those which we have now been considering, concern His praise and glory, and the establishment of His kingdom. Before a word of our own wants come the petitions "Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done." Let this teach us that as in all other things so in our prayers also, the first object is the glory of God. What are we in His sight but worms of earth? and what are our interests and our very being but the smallest possible drop to Him who made the

worlds and upholdeth all things by the word of His power? Let His glory and the reverence due to His great name swallow up all consideration of ourselves, and let that have our first and best works and petitions, and there will be time and strength enough to serve ourselves afterwards. Too many persons are apt to make religion a selfish thing, and though they often say "Our Father," and often repeat these petitions, they still have self interest at the bottom of their prayers. Alas, that this noxious weed, not content with springing up in the fallows and neglected places of our hearts, should spring up even in our holy and choice ground, and twine itself about our sacred things. Let God be our first thought—His glory our first care—to do His will our only anxiety; let our neighbours be next—their pleasure, their comfort, their liking and disliking, let them be consulted; and then we may, when these conditions have been satisfied, turn to our own wishes and consult our own convenience. But let no scheme, no desire, come to the test of our own liking, before it has been previously submitted to this examination, and has not been found wanting.

May this explanation of the prayer of our Lord tend to call our thoughts to its true meaning, and its depth and beauty; that when we use it before God, we may not be offering the sacrifice of fools, but seeking Him with all our hearts.

S E R M O N V.

“GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD. AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS.”—*St. Matthew*, vi. 11, 12.

AFTER our *petitions* for the promotion of God's *glory* and *fear* in *ourselves* and in *others*, we go on to make request for our own necessities. And we ask not for wealth, honor, or riches, but simply for our daily bread, for food sufficient for our sustenance, for so the word imports. He who lives to God, as he does not set his heart on the pleasures of the world or its comforts, so is not over anxious, or making many words about its provision; the same gracious Father who has given him a body, and brought him into life, will support him in it, if he diligently use the appointed means; and He who clothes the lilies, and gives increase to the grass in its season, and feeds the birds when they cry to Him, will not be unmindful of His people, or suffer them to lack any good thing. And therefore it is that “Give us this day our daily bread” is a sufficient expression of our wants according to that prayer of Agur in Prov. xxx 7, “Two things have I required of Thee, deny me them not before I die; Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.” Let the simple words and spirit of this petition, “Give us this day our daily bread” be a lesson to us in our acts of dependance upon God; let

our care and solicitude be confined to those things which are necessary for us, on the one hand not enlarging our desires or being covetous of more, and on the other hand let us make sure that God will give us so much, and not neglect us. It seems a sort of setting ourselves out of God's great family when we are anxious to be independent and to have resources of our own, and to live, as it were, on ourselves; where He sends such circumstances He means them as talents to be employed,—but they are not to be sought after. I often think those persons are most happy into whose lot, morning and evening, there comes the visible hand of God dispensing food and blessing. In this spirit do all His creatures depend on Him; in this spirit is it written in the Psalms, "Put thou thy trust in the Lord and be doing good; dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." And such a petition as this is most proper for those who having sought first the kingdom of God by praying "Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come," and His righteousness in praying "Thy will be done" are now putting up their request for those things which they believe, according to His promise, shall be added to them. So far we open our wants to God as the creatures of His providence,—Thou hast made us, and may it please Thee to save us alive and give us all needful things. But after this, standing as we do, before our Father in heaven, having spoken of that name which is holy, and that pure and perfect will of His which is done by happy spirits, and that blessed kingdom of His which He will accomplish, and with all these in our minds, having besought a continuance of His gifts of providence, we bethink ourselves of our manifold sins and infirmities. "Give us our daily bread;" but for what, Lord? to serve Thee with, to glorify Thee with, to spend and be spent in Thy service? Keep us in life and health; but for what, Lord? to be monu-

ments of Thy grace and reflexions of Thine own image, epistles of holiness and mirrors of purity. Oh Lord, thou knowest we are prone to sin, born in iniquity, and liable to fall, and offending Thee every hour, we ask for Thy gifts, and then we take them, and abuse them, and spend them on our lusts, and blaspheme and deny Thee, we are not upright before Thee; oh then, if it may be so, forgive us these great things which we have committed against Thee; look not on them, but for Thy goodness sake remember Thou us according to Thy mercies, O Lord. "Forgive us our trespasses," our debts which we have incurred to Thee. The request "Have patience with us and we will pay Thee all" might be well if we had anything to bring unto Thee, any satisfaction to make, but we have nothing to pay;—if Thou be extreme with us we cannot stand, if Thou enter into judgment with us we cannot be justified. We ask not then for time,—for that would avail us nothing,—we ask not for Thy long-suffering, for however long Thou bear with us, our account would come at last, and we could not bear it,—but we ask for full forgiveness, nothing short of entire forgiveness, and putting our sins out of Thy remembrance. If God Himself had not given us permission, who would have dared to approach Infinite Justice with this request? How could a sinner lift up his eyes to heaven, and pray God to be unjust, (for how could He pardon sin without it) and not fear the swift vengeance of Him who is jealous of His honour, and will by no means clear the guilty? But God who has allowed us to use this petition, has also (blessed be His name) thereby declared that a way is open for forgiveness of sins. And if we consider the world and all things therein, and look around us, we cannot but find this great and comforting word "Sin is pardoned" every where written and every where sounding. For when one man yielded to temptation, and the

evil serpent of sin crept up under his heart, and the creation of God became impure in His sight, how could it have lived for a moment in the clear light of His countenance if there had not been devised a way by which transgression might be atoned for, impurity covered, and disobedience removed, as soon as the first sin was committed? If the Lamb had not been slain from before the foundation of the world, how could the sun have kept his light, or the moon been left to rule the night, or the creatures of God have rejoiced in His presence any more? Therefore when we say "Forgive us our trespasses," we speak as those who are by the sacrifice of Christ allowed to approach near to God, and as persons who are sensible of the virtue of that sacrifice to put away all our sins. But something else is added, "As we forgive them that trespass against us." "I will," says St. Paul, "that men every where lift up holy hands, without wrath or doubting," and our Lord Himself in this same sermon on the mount, tells us to be reconciled to our brother before we come to present our offering to God. This addition then means, forgive us our trespasses as truly and entirely as we do now from the bottom of our hearts forgive every person who has at any time trespassed against us. Now this is an awful petition, and one which requires sincere dedication of heart before it can be uttered. For if when we come before God we bear ill will against any, or grudge to any, if we nourish in our hearts any desire to do any person an injury, or are not on good terms with any body, not only do we grievously mock God when we thus ask Him to forgive us as we forgive others, but be not surprised when I tell you that we have actually been praying God never to forgive our sins at all. For if when we say, forgive us our trespasses in the same manner that we forgive others, we do not forgive others, we are saying to God, forgive not our trespasses, we

beseech Thee,—than which a more awful request cannot be imagined perhaps, except that of the profane swearer and curser, who spends his days in calling on God to give him that punishment which is most justly in reserve for him. Now remember this, for it is no light matter,—as often as you have come up before God and said this prayer with unforgiving hearts, so often have you solemnly and deliberately called down His curse upon you. And do not mistake the nature of the forgiveness and Christian charity which we owe to others. It is very easy indeed just to look back upon our hearts when we begin to pray, when the tempter takes care to hide away our wicked thoughts, and make all appear as it should be, and to say I feel no malice nor hatred; this is part of the system which judges us by our feelings, but this is not after God's method of judging, which is by our fruits. Do we go out from the presence of God when we have been praying "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us," and then in private to our families, or to our friends, do we speak ill of, tell tales of, or injure in any way whatsoever,—for I know persons are apt to find loop-holes to slip out of such charges as this—the character of our neighbours? Do we endeavour to raise envy against them by magnifying any advantages God may have given them, or to lessen them in the esteem of others by exposing their imprudence, or their faults real or imaginary? This is the way an unforgiving spirit is shewn, and whoever makes a habit of doing any or all of these things, however forgiving they may be deluded into feeling when they are at their prayers, do not forgive others their trespasses, and therefore, as often as they say the Lord's prayer, pray that they may not be forgiven their own;—and the more God hears their prayers, the worse will it be for them.

Our Lord adds to the prayer a special commentary on this

petition, enforcing the meaning of it, and implying that God only vouchsafes pardon on these terms; "For if ye do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you." Happy and blessed must he be who can say this is his daily prayer, with a clear conscience in this matter, knowing the guilt of his heart, knowing that angry and malicious thoughts have arisen in his heart, and remembering such times with grief, and in the number of his trespasses; but knowing also that he has endeavoured by God's assistance to check them in their birth, and destroy them when they arose, without letting his tongue utter or his hand execute them. Happy is he who, knowing the great and deep need which he has of forgiveness before God, how much more loathsome and vile he is in the sight of God's Holiness than any of his neighbours can be in his sight, is led to self-abasement and a contrite heart, which are the surest preservatives against the rankling of pride within us, and the desire to exalt ourselves above others, which are after all the causes of a bitter and unforgiving spirit. Now do not escape out of these exhortations, I beseech you, by saying we are imperfect creatures,—we do our best,—we cannot be perfect,—it is natural to our hearts to take offence at some things, and we should not have any spirit if we did not,—we are not to submit to insult and injury, and sit still and say nothing. It is astonishing, my Brethren, how persons in a Christian land, with Christ's Gospel in their hands, can make such excuses and such confessions as these, which are not invented by me in order to say something about them, but are what we hear as often as we speak on the subject to any one. I cannot forgive him, I ought not to forgive him, are most common expressions when any one has injured our worldly welfare, our character, or what acts closest of all, our vanity. Well, be it so; you cannot, you ought not to forgive; then

you are plainly the subjects of that kingdom whose laws order you not to forgive, you have some power which you obey which makes it improper for you to forgive. And what kingdom is that? The kingdom of Christ and God? Clearly not; but the kingdom of him who brought hate and murder into the world, even of the devil, the enemy of God and His people. If you think it your duty not to forgive, you belong to this kingdom, you are a citizen of it, and to it you must go. But meantime I solemnly command you not to take the prayers of God's servants on your lips, or play the hypocrite before Him;—but if you will thus serve the pride of the world, the lust of the flesh, and the laws of the devil, serve them with a whole heart; depart from our Churches, and pollute not our solemn assemblies with your offerings. Are you astonished at your situation, thus laid before you? Then never make such an assertion as that you ought not to forgive, or cannot forgive, for as often as you do, you plainly declare whose servant you are. Very different is the spirit of God's servants, and the command of the laws of the kingdom of Christ. Instead of the haughty dark rising of the fleshly heart in the breast, and the sullen look and hurtful wish, love is the universal law; God Himself is love, and His new commandment, which, according to the recorded saying of His Apostle, if we perform, we need do nothing more, is “Little children, love one another.”

S E R M O N V I .

“AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL :
FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY,
FOR EVER. AMEN.”—*St. Matthew*, vi. 13.

AFTER these petitions for the forgiveness of our past sins, naturally are placed those in which we pray to be kept from offending in future. And therefore, we beseech God to remove from us all occasions and incitements to sin, “Lead us not into temptation ;” that is, Thou who dost govern and direct all things by Thy divine providence, may it please Thee so to order our steps, and so to overrule the accidents which shall happen to us, that we may not be brought into circumstances where we may be solicited to fall from Thee or to dishonour Thy name. Persons who are watchful and anxious for the honour and fear of God in their souls, dread the approach of temptation—their weakness and extreme carelessness in God’s work is too manifest to them not to make them shrink somewhat from the trial, and pray not to be led into temptation. How then is it, you may say, that the Apostle says, “My Brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations?” and yet we are taught to pray, “lead us not into temptation.” Why in the same way precisely that we pray in the Litany “that we, God’s servants, being hurt by no persecution, may evermore give thanks to Him in His holy Church ;”—and yet,

when persecutions have come, we count those persons happy and blessed who have undergone them, and have confest their Saviour boldly and entered into His glory. The weakness of our nature shrinks from severe trial—nor would it be consistent with true humility and self distrust to court temptation, this being to tempt the Lord our God. But when He is pleased to send the trial of our faith, it shews us that He designs to raise us up to purer degrees of His love, and make us live nearer to Himself, and improve in the divine life: and the heaviness which Christians are in through manifold temptations, increases the joy in which they rejoice by faith; and their trial of faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, will be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Such are the uses of temptation, to prepare us for God's service and make us see our dependence upon Him. Thus we see that Christ Himself was tempted before He begun the great work of His ministry. Now, my Brethren, if it becomes us as frail creatures to pray not to be led into temptation, distrusting our own power, and fearing that our poor weak faith will not stand; how much more is it our bounden duty not to cast ourselves into temptation, to avoid every place and time which may be to us an occasion of sin. We are hindering the efficacy of our prayers, and making them surely a mere dead form, if, when we pray not to be led into temptation, we leave the presence of God and of our own accord seek it. And many more of our actions are comprehended in this seeking occasions of sin than we are generally given to imagine. When we incautiously or unadvisedly thrust ourselves into stations of life which we are not calculated to fill, and thereby bring upon ourselves poverty or disgrace, what can it be called but leading ourselves into temptation? When, which is a case too common, persons settle themselves in life without counting the cost, and find

families growing about them without the means of providing for them ; have not the temptations and distresses which arise out of this state of things been of their own creating—and have they not, by want of foresight and prudence, cast themselves into a snare ?

I know I am touching upon points which are thought lightly of, and are hardly esteemed matters of religion or duty to God in these our days ; but as in other things so in this, it is the bounden duty of God's ministers to oppose that spirit which separates religion from the common concerns of life, and to teach you that every thought, every word, and every action of your daily existence, is measured by your duty to God. Those then who act in the manner I have mentioned are no doubt tempting God ; and from what we know of His ways of dealing with men, they cannot expect His blessing upon what they have thus undertaken without His warrant. Of course it is of no use for those who are in such circumstances to cast back sad reflections on the past ; their trial is now upon them, and they must look to God and beseech Him in His mercy, not to visit upon them in full measure the consequences of their imprudence ; but I say it by way of prevention and caution, and beseech all whom it may concern to consider the matter in this serious light, both with regard to themselves and to those whom God may have subjected to their influence. But if we tempt God in worldly matters, much more are we prone to do so in spiritual ones. There are persons who are extremely cautious, and providing, and thrifty, in things concerning the body, but who run up awful accounts to the charge of their poor souls, and willingly and perversely run into spiritual temptation every day. Do you suffer yourselves to delight in the company and conversation of

those who fear not God? Do you of your own accord seek it—or remain in it any longer when you are compelled to be in it than that occasion requires? Nay to come closer still—do you suffer in your own heart bad thoughts of God and His dealings to arise, or if they should arise, do you permit yourself to give way to them and be entangled in their falsehood? Do you let your mind be carried away by impurity into a train of unclean and wanton thoughts? Be sure as often as you do any of these, you are leading yourselves into temptation; you are calling out to the tempter to come to you, and be sure he will obey your call, for he never omits an occasion of doing God's cause an injury or weakening the faith of His saints. Once more, do you by the neglect of constant private prayer suffer your heart to be overgrown with evil weeds, and your conscience which is always most awake and active while you are at prayer, to become seared and deadened so as to lose the sense of right and wrong according to the will of God? This is by neglect and sinful forgetfulness to fall into a great snare, to absent one's self from the presence of that God of Whom it is said, "draw nigh to Him and He will draw nigh unto you;" and thereby to give our adversary great advantage against us. Those who have long neglected private prayer, have a long road to go to get back to Christian peace and a sense of God's love. By neglect of family and public prayer too, the same evil consequences are risked, and the same temptations run into. The omission of seeking God in our families will be as it were putting away His blessing from our family connexions and duties; and we cannot but fear to fall into sin in these matters, where we do not take the most plain and obvious means to be kept from it. Those who stay away from the public worship of God, bring upon

themselves a snare, besides that of breaking the Sabbath, of forgetting Him and His worship; and when the sun of God's fear sets in our hearts, be sure the evil beasts of sin and darkness are abroad within us, raging for their prey. Be careful then not in any of these ways to tempt God, so that when you pray, "Lead us not into temptation," you may not be mocking Him, and that you may be comforted with the thought when any trial does come on you,—this is of my heavenly Father's sending, He will enable me to bear it.

Now, we proceed with the prayer:—having besought God not to lead us into temptation, we seem, as it were, to recollect that He may see it good for us that we should be tempted; and therefore we next beg of Him in temptation to "deliver us from evil." If it please Thee, suffer us not to be tempted; but if Thou bring upon us for wise reasons the trial, oh, suffer us not to fall into sin, but of Thy mercy carry us through it pure and spotless from any stain of evil. Also, this petition begs of God to deliver us from all outward evil to which, by reason of the frailty of our nature, and the evil passions in ourselves or others, we are liable; and in general, as we had it express in the collect for the Second Sunday in Lent, "from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul." And so we have summed up all our requests, and made known all our wants to God our Father in heaven—for His glory, for others and for ourselves. And now, what remains but to ascribe unto Him the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever? We have prayed, "Thy kingdom come,"—now we say, "For Thine *is* the kingdom;" others rise up and rule in the world, and claim to be kings, and seem to order things as they will—but Thou Lord reignest; others raise up disturbances in the earth, and turn things upside down and establish themselves—

but Thou, Lord, sittest between the Cherubims be the earth never so unquiet: and therefore Thine is the power also. We have asked many and great things—we have taken upon ourselves to speak unto God—and now we say, “Lord, if thou wilt thou canst, Thine is the power.” Our foes in the spirit, our fleshly lusts, our worldly hearts have great power over us, and other lords have had and have dominion over us; but Thine is the power—one word from Thee and they all are brought to nought. Thine is the power to make Thy name hallowed, for Thou hast said, “I will sanctify My great name,” -- Thou hast written, “from the rising of the sun, even to the going down of the same, My name shall be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering for My name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of Hosts.” Thine is the power to bring about Thy kingdom, for Thou hast written, “The kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever.” Thine is the power to give us our daily bread—for Thou openest Thine hand and fillest all things living with plenteousness. Thine is the power to forgive our trespasses—for Thou hast proclaimed Thyself “the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.” Thine is the power to keep us from temptation, for “Thou dost not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men;” and Thine is the power to deliver us from evil, for the Lord “knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation; and He shall give His angels charge concerning them, to bear them in their hands lest they dash their feet against a stone,” and He has promised “there shall no evil befall them, neither plague come nigh their dwelling.” And since Thine is the power to do all this, and ours is Thy promise that Thou wilt do it, we look forward to

the glorious accomplishment of it all and give Thee all the glory. Thine is the glory—not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give the praise. All the glorying of men shall be put down, and the high looks of men shall be humbled, and the haughty looks of man shall be pulled down; and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. And even then, when Thy glory shall be ours, yet all the glory shall be Thine, for Thou wilt fill all in all. And this for ever and ever. This last is the only part of the prayer which we shall take with us to heaven—all the rest are petitions for the supply of temporary wants, and for blessings which belong to this state of time; but this part is for eternity.

When the kingdom of God is come, and His name is mightily sanctified, and His will perfectly done; when there shall be no more need of daily bread, but the food of angels shall be our food; when there shall be no more trespasses to forgive, none that trespass against us, no temptation to try us, and no evil to approach us: these words shall be our song to all ages, “Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever.” They are part of that new song which the redeemed sing before the throne—the song of Moses and the Lamb!

And now, by God's help, we have explained to you this divine prayer, and endeavoured to enforce upon you the duties and the states of mind which the use of such words implies. May the words which have been spoken on it not have been mere empty sounds, which have not reached your hearts; but, may they have made such a lasting impression, as to produce the fruits of good living towards God.

He only knows how much we each of us regard His name, and who there are among us that walk with His fear before their eyes. And when He shall make manifest to all who those

persons are ; may very many of those who now hear me, appear among them, to the unspeakable joy of themselves and of Him who is appointed their Minister, and to the glory of God's holy name.

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On the Beatitudes.

SERMON VII.

“BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT; FOR THEIR’S IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.”—*Matt. v. 4.*

OUR Blessed Saviour, in His divine discourses, always places humility at the entrance of the spiritual life of man.—“Except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.” “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” And here, when making, as it were, the proclamation of His mission and the nature of His gospel, He places this grace of humility first in the catalogue of blessings: “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for their’s is the kingdom of heaven.” So that you see, humility seems to be indispensable to a man’s being a partaker of the blessings of the gospel; and our time, this day, will be well employed in meditating on that which it should be so great an object with us to cultivate, if we have really any love for Christ or our own souls. May God the Holy Spirit, by Whose blessed influence alone this and all other christian graces are implanted in the heart, grant us such a measure of His assistance, that we may be able truly to describe the nature of it, and to shew how necessary it is for those who would come to Christ or enjoy His kingdom.

When St. Paul was asked by the Jailor at Philippi, “What

must I do to be saved ?” his answer was, “ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” It will assist us in the consideration of our subject, if we examine what sort of a belief it is which is here spoken of. It clearly means something more than a general belief in the truth of gospel history ; it implies a belief, not merely that Christ came down and took our nature, and died for sin, but that it was for *our* sins that this was done, and that we are removed from the guilt and power of them by the virtue of that sacrifice. Now the first step towards this belief is to feel the burden of sin, and a desire to be relieved from it. Till this is felt, we shall not believe on Christ, for we shall not be sensible of our need of Him. And what is it to feel the burden of sin ? why, to feel that we are being led captive against our will, and drawn on to our misery and ruin—that we cannot save ourselves—that we are utterly without strength, whereas our enemies are mighty and press heavily upon us. Then also comes upon the soul a sense of the holiness and purity of God, a sense of His power to punish and also of His *power* to save us ; but a doubt of His willingness. We are ourselves placed at an infinite distance, by our vileness and impotence, from an all pure and Almighty Being ; we see that we have nothing to approach Him with, no plea to put up before Him, and fear that His very presence will strike us dead ; so much do we dread His wrath. But we have heard that Jesus Christ died for sinners, yea, for the greatest ; we have been told that we have been planted in the likeness of His death ; we cling hold of this as a sentenced man to his hope of pardon—we know not how, but it seems to give us new life and strength ; the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth makes us, as it did the lame man of old, rise up, and leap, and walk, and praise God. And the cross of Christ, which we before despised, becomes our joy, and our glory, and our object of reverence—we love to speak of Him, love to glorify Him, seek

to imitate Him, and in all our actions to go where He has led the way and left his footmarks and learn to despise all things for Him. This is the belief in the Lord Jesus Christ which brings salvation. Now let us see what changes in our thoughts of ourselves this produces. What were we in this respect before all this begun? or, in other words, what is it our natural inclination to be now? Is it not, to be contented with ourselves, and living in a state of self satisfaction—not feeling our need of anything, but thinking we are well furnished for our soul's wants, and comforting ourselves that in this matter we are not worse off than our neighbours—and continually looking out for something that may minister to our vanity and good opinion of ourselves? But when God has opened our eyes to our real state, how different will our estimation then be; the bubble is now burst, the false colouring taken off; and we see how less than nothing itself all our fancied stock of goodness is—and we perceive ourselves to be wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Now this is being poor in spirit. Just as being outwardly poor is to be deprived of the means of subsistence, and its extreme state is, to be obliged to ask of another the necessaries of life; so being inwardly and spiritually poor is to feel ourselves void of all means of sustaining spiritual life; and its extreme state, a state which every Christian has gone through, is, to throw ourselves at the feet of Jesus, acknowledge ourselves utterly destitute, and beg of Him in a spiritual sense to give us day by day our daily bread. Now is it not easy to perceive that this poverty of spirit is absolutely necessary before we can embrace the salvation of Jesus? Do you not see that this is the narrow entrance which leads to the path of life? And as it is narrow so is it also difficult: few there be that go in at it. Poverty of spirit and low thoughts of self are directly opposed to the tendencies and inclinations of the natural

heart. If we examine half the joys that we feel, half the motives that actuate us, we shall find that pride in one shape or other is at the bottom of them. How seldom do we perform a duty without some self-applause, and saying "well done" in our hearts; and how seldom do we omit one, without self-excusing, and trying to keep together our good opinion of ourselves! And if we would trace half our sorrows and inconveniencies to their source, we should find wounded pride at the bottom of them. Are we envious at another? It is because we think we deserved as well as he, and suppose ourselves undervalued. Are we discontented with our rank in society? This was the very sin that caused the angels to fall: and there is no one sin that is so direct a blasphemy against the providence of God, or renders all spiritual improvement more utterly hopeless; yet this is begotten by pride. All that the world tells of the sense of honour; all that it praises as proof of high spirit; all that it proposes for imitation by those who would rise in its favour, are but different ways of serving up the same favourite morsel, pride.

We may suppose then that it is no easy task to pull down this high imagination, which exalts itself against God; to see our meanness and wretchedness, and to be feelingly convinced that we have nothing to be proud of. It is easy enough to profess this before men; but can we meekly endure to be told so by another? can we bear reviling and evil speaking, without returning it, and feel that it is true without malice toward him who reviles us? It is easy to go down on our knees before God, and confess that we have done the things that we ought not to have done, and left undone the things that we ought to have done, and there is no health in us; but can we in spirit and in truth from the bottom of our hearts, acknowledge ourselves vile and miserable sinners? It is easy in times of sickness and affliction

to throw away our pride, when we have no occasion to use it, and humble ourselves, because we are afraid of God; but can we day by day in our intercourse with men, habitually lay it aside and be content to be thought meanly of for our Master's sake? It is easy to persuade ourselves in a careless and general way that we think lowly of ourselves and highly of Christ; but do we really and sincerely find that He holds the foremost place in our thoughts and esteem, and that in all our schemes and plans we make it the first thought and object to please Him, before we think of ourselves? If we be truly *poor in spirit* and not only in profession, all these things will be our endeavour and our practice. As this poverty of spirit is so important and so difficult to attain, it may not be amiss to lay before you a few considerations which may serve to produce and cherish it, with the assistance of Him from whom comes every good and perfect gift.

I.—Let us think much on the character of God as shewn to us in His holy Word. Let us not compare ourselves with our fellow-men, for we shall not be judged by them; but be more studious to set in contrast one against the other God's purity and holiness, and our own uncleanness and sinfulness. It was the sense of the presence of Divine Power which made St. Peter exclaim, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man O Lord." Let us set our secret sins in the light of His countenance, that they may be reprov'd and made manifest by it. Let us endeavour to think what we should be if we were doing His will on earth as it is done in heaven, and then turn to the real state of our hearts: the more we draw such strong contrasts as this, the more will our guilt and wretchedness and cause for humiliation appear.

II.—Let us be careful to separate any good intentions or designus which we may find springing up in our hearts from *ourselves*; and to ascribe them immediately to God's Holy

Spirit. For though the workings of that divine Comforter are carried on in a way of which we often are not aware at the time, nothing is more certain than that we have no power of ourselves so much as to think a good thing, and that every desire of serving and loving God comes from Himself.

III.—Let us be very watchful against occasions of pride. If God has made us better than others who have not the knowledge of His Name, and has enabled us to live with Him before our eyes, let us avoid all self-congratulation when we think on this difference; let us break down the thoughts that are apt to rise in our hearts, and cast ourselves humbly at God's footstool saying, "What am I, O Lord, that Thou shouldst come and dwell with Thy servant?" and let us *carefully abstain* from judging others. How do we know that the Holy Spirit is not carrying on even now a work in the hearts of many whom we deem ignorant of Him? Nothing ministers more to spiritual pride than this habit—and no habit are we so apt to indulge in. Far better it would be, to count all around us to be God's people, till we have very open and undeniable proof to the contrary; this is the right side on which to be mistaken: this is far more agreeable to that charity which hopeth all things, and covereth a multitude of sins, than the course more usually pursued among Christians, of counting all aliens from Christ till they have a proof of their being His. There will be many a surprise, at the day when we shall wake up and see things as they are, to behold persons far above us in the kingdom of glory, whom we in our uncharitable pride deemed excluded from the kingdom of grace.

IV.—Another great step to the attainment of humility is, to forget those things which are behind, and press onward to those which are before. It is dangerous to employ ourselves too much

in looking back on God's dealings with us; we are very apt to lose sight of Him in our search, and find we are looking at our own doings all the time. Besides, how little, how very little can we know in this our imperfect state, of the way by which He has been leading us! If any remarkable providence befall us; or any extraordinary lesson have been conveyed to our souls, it is our duty to lay hold of it, and improve it, and retain it in our memory; but I cannot help thinking it is very hurtful to our spiritual life to be perpetually looking back on our progress;—our concern is with the things which are *before*: there is our hope, there our crown of rejoicing, there are the subjects we should be thinking on—even the glory which is to be revealed, that exceeding weight of glory, to which our light afflictions are not to be compared. Here is matter enough for deep self-abasement, when we think of our own unworthiness to inherit the great things which He has prepared for them that love Him; and matter too for trust in *His* goodness and power, who we hope is preparing us for the enjoyment of them.

And let us beware how we look for evidence *in ourselves* of God's disposition towards us; how we trust to any frame of mind, or feelings of our own, for proofs of His work on our souls. Nothing can be more uncertain, nothing more false than such feelings; they may be the result of bodily constitution; they may be the offspring of our own corrupt hearts, or even the work of the enemy of our spirits in order to deceive us. The truly poor in spirit will cast off all such grounds of reliance; will count himself as *nothing* in the matter, and cling to Christ alone, on Whom he can trust, both when He hides His face, and when He shines graciously on him. Our prayer should be, "Lord let me enjoy Thy sweet presence if Thou seest it good for me; but if not, Thy will be done." All we are required to examine and prove

ourselves in, is, whether we be in the faith : and this is easily ascertained : the lines of distinction of our motives, thoughts, and actions, whether we be, or be not, the children of God, are clearly drawn ; clearly enough for any one to see who will but honestly look into his own heart. It seems to me to be the most hopeless form of self-righteousness, when a person is perpetually requiring in his own feelings proofs of his growth in grace. We are not told to *see whether we have grown* in grace, but to *grow in* grace. When we have once believed in the sufficiency of Christ, and committed our souls to Him, holiness must be our desire and end ; we must strive to shew our love to Him by keeping His commandments. His Holy Spirit is given us not that we may see how far we have gone, but that we may be able to go further, And if we still will be anxious to know what progress we have made in the spiritual life, we have one certain way ; we have only to apply to ourselves the rule which Christ gives us respecting others, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” In proportion as we deny ourselves, and do His work, we love Christ ; and not in proportion as we are happy or miserable at different times. And with respect to His love to us, He can never change ; and it is wronging Him as well as doing an injury to ourselves, to estimate it by our own changeable feelings. Always remember that God’s people may lose the *sense* of His love, but His *love itself* they can never lose.

The truly poor in spirit will also be endeavouring to withdraw his thoughts and affections from worldly things. Such objects of trust are indeed but false riches ; for he who is rich to this world, that is, he who puts his trust in anything here below, is poor toward God. Oh that we could sufficiently see the miserable, the contemptible short sightedness of leaning on such supports ! They may be withdrawn from us in a moment—five minutes pain may make us insensible to them

all; and death *must* separate between us and them for ever. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, are but poor and pitiful ornaments for one whose adornment should be the bright garment of spiritual holiness. All such must be laid aside, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him; we must be ready to leave every thing for His sake: thus becoming poor, in order that we may be rich indeed.

And lastly and principally, if we would become truly humble, we must be ever looking at the Cross of Christ. There is nothing that will draw us out of ourselves so much as meditation on the love and glory of our Saviour; we shall be more fully sensible of our own unworthiness, when we have tasted His sufficiency; we shall learn more and more to distrust ourselves, when we become accustomed to look up to Him for daily supplies of grace and strength. We shall not then be much taken with anything which the world has to offer. We shall count every thing empty which He does not fill with His presence; we shall turn from it, as Mary did from the sepulchre, to seek our Lord, and not rest till we have found Him; we shall love His ordinances of praise and prayer: for where two or three are gathered together in His name, there is He in the midst of them. We shall love His Sacraments, for they are done in remembrance of Him, and are means of grace in which He manifests Himself to the soul. We shall love His people, for they bear His image. We shall love to think on all He did for us; His Birth of humiliation; His Baptism of condescension; His Life of sorrow, and Death of pain; and as the seasons come round in which the Church commemorates all these, we shall be ever ready to bear our part, ever joyful to have an opportunity set apart for meditating on Him. He will be to us the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. This is true

poverty of spirit, to see that we have nothing in ourselves, and be led to look for all things in Him.

And I need not say that to acquire this we want other help than our own. The evil spirit of pride is of that kind that cometh not out but by prayer and fasting. But it is one which must be cast out, before we can sit at the feet of Jesus in our right mind. O let us then cultivate the spirit of prayer. Let us come before the throne of God, and fall down before Him; for the very sense of His presence may be the means of humbling us: and more than this, let us pray without ceasing, that is, let us be continually in a state of communion with Him, walking with Him, as a man walks with his friend.

Thus shall we be kept in a continual fear of offending Him; thus will our words and our thoughts become chastened down, and we shall be watchful that nothing escapes us which may bring disgrace on our Christian profession, or discredit on His Holy Name. And thus by the help of His Spirit, which is continually supplied to them whom He brings up in His fear and love, we shall be growing in grace, and going on from strength to strength, ripening for that kingdom of glory which is said in our text to belong to the poor in spirit.

Of that kingdom and the blessed effects of the expectation of it on our Christian life, I hope, by God's blessing, to speak to you in another sermon.

Meantime, may we all have grace to profit by this declaration of our blessed Saviour; may He enable us to deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow Him; may He strip us of all fancied goodness of our own, and shew us our need of being clothed with His most spotless and perfect righteousness. And may He at length present us before the presence of His Father faultless with exceeding joy, to be with Him for ever.

SERMON VIII.

“BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT; FOR THEIR'S IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.”—*Matt. v. 4.*

I HAVE already endeavoured to point out to you a few things concerning the poverty of spirit which is declared in the text to be blessed. I spoke of its nature,—of its importance,—of its difficulty,—and gave you a few hints which I hoped, by God's blessing, might prove useful towards its attainment. But I said nothing on the latter part of the verse. We will now, therefore, resume the subject, and meditate this evening on the *blessedness* of the poor in spirit. Blessed are the poor! How different a judgment from that which men generally pronounce! If we may gather anything from what we see going on around us, “Blessed are the rich” is by far the more general opinion. Worldly wealth, and the good opinion of men seem the objects of universal pursuit; a poor-spirited person is one whom the world esteems very little, or rather, casts out altogether. The spirit of the man who prefers others in honor before himself,—who suffers evil, not returning it again,—who gives place to wrath,—who continues quietly in the station where God has placed him, because he views the least blessings as coming from Him, and does not count himself deserving even of the least, is not a spirit much calculated to push his way in the world, or make him very conspicuous among his fellow men. It seems, then, that it is not in what

men commonly account happiness that we are to look for that of the poor in spirit. And it is well that it is so; for worldly happiness would be but a poor set-off against the difficulties, and trials, and struggles through which those who are anxious to become poor in spirit must pass. But Christ Himself tells us plainly what this blessedness is,—it consists in the possession of the kingdom of heaven. Let us examine, then, what these words import; and may He who dwells and makes His temple in the humble heart, grant that we may approach so great and high a subject with becoming humility and distrust of ourselves, trusting in His enlightening power to open our eyes to see the riches of this blessedness, and the glory of his inheritance in Christ Jesus.

The words, “The kingdom of heaven,” are frequently used in the New Testament to denote the Christian religion,—that new dispensation, by which life and immortality were brought to light, and the kingdom of heaven opened to all believers. Thus in Matt. iii. 2., we read that St. John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judæa, and saying, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” that is, the time for the Christian dispensation to be revealed is now arrived: and in Matt. xi. 11., Christ says, “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist; but the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he,” that is, the least of those who have been made partakers of the Gospel is greater than the greatest of those who lived before it was revealed. If, therefore, we take this meaning of the words, the blessedness mentioned in the text will mean, “Their’s are the promises and the privileges of the Christian religion;” and it is in this view that I shall principally consider it.

First then, the promises of the Gospel belong to the poor in spirit. “Come unto Me,” says Christ, “ye that are

weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." As bodily weariness, and a heavy burden, are not things of which the rich in this world have to complain;—in like manner the spiritually weary here spoken of, and the heavy laden here invited, are not those who fancy themselves well furnished with store for their souls, but the spiritually poor, those who are wearied with the labors which that hardest of masters, sin, exacts of them, and heavy laden with the burdens which he puts upon them. Such persons, we are told, shall find rest unto their souls; for rest is not desired, till fatigue has been felt, nor would it be sweet without being previously toiled for. Again, "I came not," says He, "to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,"—not those who fancy their own righteousness a sufficient claim to the divine favour, but those who are sensible of their state as sinners, cast out from it, and needing to be restored. All the benefits, then, which Christ came down from heaven to purchase for us, belong to the poor in spirit,—the *privileges* of the Gospel belong to him. One of the most eminent of these privileges is the being permitted to call God his Father, and trust with an implicit faith in His care and love of him. This is the proper effect of true humility of spirit, this is that true childlike submission of which Christ spoke when He set a little child in the midst of His disciples, and said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." This is that true renouncing of all self-will and perverseness, which was so eminent in our Saviour Himself in His hour of humiliation, when He cried and said, "Father, if Thou wilt, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Here it is that the humble man possesses such a great advantage over the proud and self-trusting; when the dark days come, and the bitter waters of trouble are given Him to drink, he can quietly submit, for he knows Whom he has trusted; he has long ago deter-

mined, by divine grace, to give up himself into the hands of God for better or for worse, knowing that He will bring him safe home at the last; and let a wise Providence send what stroke it will, he knows that it is still a loving Providence, and that all such distresses are but thorns and briars in his narrow way to glory; whereas the man who confided in himself has his confidence taken away from under him and nothing put in its stead,—he knows not whither to turn for succour,—he has never been accustomed to look out of himself for help, and it is hard, when the storm is raging, for them to build up a shelter, who have neglected to do it in the time of peace beforehand. What the world calls an independent spirit may do very well as long as God pours down worldly blessings upon us, and we rejoice in the abundance and fancy it our own; but when He withdraws these, and leaves us with nothing between ourselves and Him, thus bringing us into His immediate presence—if we have not been walking humbly with Him before, our state is most awful; to have, at such a time, to make ourselves acquainted with God, and be reconciled to Him, when we want all the comforts of His gospel. Here, then, the poor in spirit is indeed blessed—having the great gain of godliness with contentment.

Another great privilege is the enjoyment of the means of grace. None but the truly humble can enter into communion with God in them. Observe the feelings required and professed at the very beginning of our daily service,—“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,”—“Rend your hearts, and turn unto the Lord your God,”—“Enter not into judgment with Thy servant;”—all expressions of deep contrition and humility. Then, in the office of the Holy Communion, “We do not presume to come to this Thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in Thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs

under Thy table." Who but a man truly humbled and poor in spirit, could enter into the full meaning of these expressions so as to apply them to himself? And in private prayer, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before God, all who have any experience in it (and I sincerely hope that will include most of us) will bear me out in saying that, till we have come before God in the situation of helpless and needy creatures, till we have emptied ourselves of all that we pride ourselves in, and thrown ourselves at His feet to wait for His mercy, we can never put that earnestness of spirit, that full expression of our desires in prayer, which seems almost to bring its own answer in the very uttering; till this has been the case, we can never have that due sense of all His mercies, which will make us unfeignedly thankful for them. Here then the humble man must have greatly the advantage; even to the extent implied in the assertion, that God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.

Another great privilege of the gospel is the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; that knowledge for which the blessed Apostle Paul was willing to count all things but dross: the excellency of the knowledge of Christ his Lord. Here too the poor in spirit will make the greatest advances. Even in human knowledge it has been remarked, that the further a man advances, the more he sees he has to learn, and the less he seems already to have mastered; how much more then will this be the case with the learners of that heavenly wisdom, whose length, and breadth, and height, none can ever fully know; which shall be the study and delight of purified spirits to all eternity? The more we have been in the depth of humility, the lower shall we be able to descend with Christ in meditating on His humiliation for our sakes; the better shall we be able to understand the nature of His sufferings, and to appreciate and follow the example of His

most holy life; and to draw comfort in our trials from the consideration,—“all this, and more, my Saviour went through before me.”

In the Christian conflict too, and the great business of a holy life, the humble man has all the advantage. We are exhorted by St. Paul to lay aside every weight, and run with patience the race that is set before us. Now this is the very aim and employment of humility. The proud man carries many encumbrances in such a contest, which the poor in spirit is without. It is difficult for him who puts his trust in anything this world affords, to part at God's call with his darling object of reliance, and yield up that which he had valued as his right hand or his right eye: but it must be done; and bitter is the sorrow, and violent the wrench, which tears asunder friends who had made idols of one another; or separates a man suddenly from all his thriving possessions: whereas the poor in spirit has no such drawbacks as these:—he has a friend, it is true whom, he loves with more than the strongest earthly love; but that Friend can never be taken from him; he has, it is true, riches, over which he is more watchful, and on which he thinks more, than the worldly man of his gold and his crowded barns; but then they are laid up where moth and rust do not corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.

But we have a nobler privilege, a higher advantage, a more complete blessing, yet behind. We have proved the humble man to be the possessor of the promises: but he shall also inherit their fulfilment. We have shewn that he can call God **his** Father: but he also can call heaven his home. We have seen that he is readiest to bear the cross: but he shall also wear the crown. He enjoys most the means of grace: but he possesses also the hope of glory. He suffers with his Saviour: he shall also reign with Him. Ever since the

appearance of Christ upon earth, humility and glory have gone together. In His own life we find that the times of His greatest humiliation were the times of His greatest glory also. When He lay a helpless child in the manger at Bethlehem, a great company of the heavenly host proclaimed His birth to the shepherds, and His star appeared in the East to guide the wise men to come and worship Him. When He submitted to receive baptism at the hands of him who was not worthy to unloose His shoe latchet, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, and the Father declared Him to be His well beloved Son in whom He was well pleased. When His person was put for a season under the power of the adversary, and He was in all things tempted like as we are, angels came and ministered unto Him. In the garden when they came out as against a thief with swords and with staves for to take Him, He spake but a word, and they went backwards and fell to the ground. And at that great and final humiliation on the cross, when He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me," the rocks were rent, and the earth opened, and the veil of the temple was rent, and the Centurion who saw what was done, said: "Truly this was the Son of God." And so also it is with His people. Their times of deepest humiliation and abasement are the times when God most clearly manifests to them the hope of the glory that shall be revealed. And because they have been led to see that they have nothing in themselves to trust to, and nothing in this world worth leaning upon in confidence, they are more wedded to Christ; more one with Him, and in consequence look more for His glorious appearing. They feel more than others the hindrances and temptations which the flesh throws in their way, and therefore they long more for the time when Christ shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like to His glorious body.

They are more sensible than others of their great ignorance in spiritual things, and their blindness to the glory of Christ by reason of sin; and therefore they desire more to come to the day when they shall see Him face to face, and know even as they are known. They are "poor in spirit," and in consequence crave more earnestly the riches which are at God's right hand: they have not where to lay their heads, no spiritual rest or peace here below, so they think more of those many mansions where their Saviour is preparing a place for them. And this is the strict sense of the words also, "their's is the kingdom of heaven."

And now, with all these advantages in view; the possession of the promises and privileges of the gospel; the enjoyment of the means of grace, and the hope of glory; assistance in your conflict, and blessedness at the end of it: does not this humility, this poverty of spirit appear desirable in your eyes? or does it still, like Him who pronounced it "blessed," and furnished the brightest Example of it, seem to have no form nor comeliness, and when you see it, no beauty that you should desire it? Believe me, it is of great price in the sight of God: I have not told you, nor can I tell you, one tenth part of the blessings that attend upon it; for could I do so, I should be recounting things that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. Its root is indeed low; it strikes in the quiet and sheltered places of the earth: but its blossom and fruit are in the heavens, hard by the throne of God. It is but poorly thought of here; but is of great account and estimation there. The highest angel, he who sees most of the glory and the providence of God, is also the humblest; then how much more cause have we for humility, who in addition to owing our being to God as we do, have so great and manifest sins to be abased for; and such undeserved mercies of redemption put

before us, to shew us, that when we loved not God He loved us; and to set off the more our rebellion and ingratitude towards Him.

But I cannot conclude without reminding you, that the main end and object of all this, is to bring you to Christ. Seeing your own emptiness and renouncing yourselves is indeed the first step; but it is nothing, unless you make it accessory to that other, which is, to see the fulness of Christ, and His willingness to save you; to see your baptismal privileges and your baptismal duties; to accept Him by faith for your Redeemer; to commit your souls into His keeping; and to yield yourselves up, souls and bodies, to Him as a living sacrifice, which is your reasonable service. Humility is only valuable as it leads to all this; and all the blessings which I have enumerated only belong to it, as it is the introduction to a life of faith on the Son of God, and of progressive holiness under the teaching of His Spirit. This is the light in which I wish to recommend it.

Are there any here who feel their spiritual energies deadened, and their souls cleaving to the dust, for want of animation and fervour in the things of God? To you this subject is peculiarly applicable. You have tried perhaps to lift up your hearts and affections by thinking of the glory that is to come, and of the love of your Saviour; but all will not do. Try another method, for in these cases we must try every thing that may rouse and awaken us: look into yourselves, examine and see what you have in you that has deserved the commonest mercies of God; make your deadness towards Him a motive for humiliation and abasement in His sight, and He will ere long make His goodness pass before you, and look on you with the light of His countenance.

Are there any who seem to have the hope of Christ's salvation in them, and yet dare not think on *death*; but shrink

from it, they cannot tell why, as if they had no hope beyond ? Be sure you want humbling ; you are too much wrapt up in something here in this world : pray God to shew you what it is, and even to remove it from you, rather than suffer it any longer to stand between you and your desire to be with Christ.

Am I addressing any, who after the fashion of the religion of the present day, are walking in the sight of their own eyes, and selecting their own path, disregarding the great duty of simple obedience to the Church in which God hath placed them, in all things lawful and good ? Persons to whom the sacred seasons of the Christian year are no times of profit ; the Holy Sacraments no means of grace ; to whom baptism brings no assurance ; the Lord's Supper no refreshment ; Lent and Advent no earnest repentance ; Easter and Christmas no holy joy ? Let me remind them how much they are losing ; let me entreat them to cultivate poverty of spirit, and cast out this inward pride, the very essence of schism which makes them unwilling humbly to walk by the course of God's ordinances. Let all try then to cast off the hard yoke of rebellion and self-seeking, and take on them the easy rule of Christ, even the blessed ordinances and helps of His Holy Church : so shall they find rest unto their souls.

Are there any here who are utterly careless about the whole matter, who neither see, nor wish to see, how all this affects them, or what it has to do with their thoughts or practice ? It is the hardest duty Christ's ministers have, to speak to such persons. What language shall we use, or how shall we make you understand your own sinfulness, or the desirableness and sufficiency of Christ ? Alas we know not,—we can only pray you, which we do most seriously and earnestly, to enquire of yourselves whether all this be not worth a thought or two ; whether as you value peace on your dying bed, or after it,

you are not bound to take these things to heart, and to think very differently of them, from that which has been your manner of thinking in times past.

Thus have I endeavoured to explain to you, in reliance on the blessing of God, and the help of His Holy Spirit, this most important declaration of our blessed Saviour.

In a few years time we shall all of us be summoned before the throne of God: I, to give an account of my ministry; you, of your opportunities. May God grant that these sermons may not, at that solemn hour, rise up in judgment against either of us.

SERMON IX.

“BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN: FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED.”--*Matt. v. 4.*

I HAVE begun explaining to you some of the peculiarities and excellencies of those characters whom our Saviour pronounces blessed. I need not say, that such an enquiry and explanation are very instructive: for these declarations were made by Him in the very out-set of His ministry, and seem to have been intended to set forth the distinguishing marks which made His doctrine differ from other systems which had been given to the world. And they form, therefore, a short list of those dispositions and graces which will be more particularly manifested in the christian life. I have on two former occasions explained to you the blessedness of the poor in spirit. We now come to the second class in that goodly company, who are the sharers of the promises and the privileges of the gospel. “Blessed are they that mourn.” This seems an extraordinary declaration; for the very idea of mourning implies misery: and yet, those who mourn are blessed. In our former meditations, we saw that God’s thoughts were different from man’s thoughts; that the strength of the world was weakness in His sight; and that persons who were poorly esteemed by the world, were of high price in the sight of God. Thus He casts contempt on the world’s pride: we shall now see that the *joy* of the world, is as different from that of God’s people,

as its glory is from theirs. "Blessed are they that mourn." But then you will say all men are blessed; for all have mourned. Man is born to sorrow, as the sparks fly upward. There is not one who has arrived at the years of manhood, who has not suffered some painful reverse, or wept over some bitter bereavement, or languished in some severe disease, or had the pride of his spirit wounded by some cruel neglect; and then we have all of us mourned. But we shall search in vain to find any blessedness connected with our times of mourning, considered only as such. In fact, what is our life but a continual occasion for mourning? every day something is going wrong, something is reminding us of our mortal lot of uncertainty and suffering. Our very occasions of greatest joy are accompanied with mourning; our days of marriage are days of parting from our fathers' homes; a wished-for increase to our families, is accompanied with anxiety and danger for those we love: the joy of inheritance begins in the mourning for a near relation; and there is no where that we can cast our eyes, where the cry of the mourner does not go up from the world.

In such a state of things as this, the assurance, "Blessed are they that mourn," must be a comforting one indeed. But are all these mourners blessed? May every one who mourns lay to his heart this comfort, and cure his inward pain? If so, all the ways of sin and profligacy would be blessed: for they lead to mourning. It becomes therefore, important to distinguish, and clearly to ascertain, what sort of mourners they are who are here called blessed.

And notice first, that there is a sorrow which is unto death: the sorrow of this world. And there is a sorrow unto life: a sorrow of a godly sort. We will first consider those mourners, who are not entitled to the blessing here mentioned.

And first among these, because the most common, those who

indulge the sorrow of *discontent* cannot be blessed. Whether our station in life, our means in that station, our lack of some advantages we might possess, or the presence of some inconveniencies we might be without, be the subject of our murmuring, we cannot look for a blessing with it, for it must be in direct opposition to God's providence, and whoever opposeth Him shall not prosper.

And nearly related to this, is *inordinate sorrow for worldly losses*. I do not mean to reprove that natural sorrow, which will arise when God sends us afflicting strokes of His providence, and removes from us the desire of our eyes; but that ungodly despairing sorrow, which arises from want of trust in God; and which consumes the heart, and has the more power, the longer it holds a man.

Again, sorrow for disappointed worldly schemes is not a blessed sorrow. For he that indulges it, is guilty of two sins against God; in the first place, he trusted too much to his own foresight and skill to accomplish his schemes, and did not commit his way unto the Lord; and in the second place, he does not see the hand of God in what has happened to him ordering all for the best; but thinks, if so and so had been mine, how much happier should I be!

Next to this, comes *sorrow for wounded pride*; and I am sure all who have felt it, will bear me witness, that there is no blessedness in this sorrow. This is that which more than any thing else embitters life; some one has spoken slightly of us, or done an unkind act towards us, or even conferred a favour on others, which we fancy we deserved as well, and we are grieved at heart, and sit in sullen self-tormenting—and why? because perhaps for the first time in our lives we are permitted to be like our Master, and to suffer with Him. This sorrow is, perhaps, the farthest from blessedness of them all; nay, it may be called a foretaste

on earth of the eternal torments which await persons who indulge it after this life.

I must add to this list of those mourners who are not blessed, those who mourn from a *despairing spirit as to their acceptance with God*. No joy ever came out of such sorrow as this. Careful as God's ministers should be to bind up the broken hearted, we must not conceal the truth from you; but must tell you plainly that this distrust of God not only carries no blessedness with it, but is mentioned in scripture as a positive sin; and the contrary to it, entire trust in Him for all spiritual blessings is enforced as a binding duty upon all believers in His dear Son.

All these descriptions of mourners then are not blessed. And yet our Saviour says, "Blessed are they that mourn." We will then examine some other classes of mourners, and see whether they have any title to this heavenly benediction.

There is a mourning arising from a *sense of having offended God*, and which causes us to humble ourselves before Him. Now this mourning is blessed; this is the beginning of the repentance unto life not to be repented of, spoken of in Scripture; this is the sorrow which even in Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, met with its comfort, for when Ahab repented, and put on sackcloth and went softly, at hearing the judgments of God denounced against him, the Lord said to Elijah, "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before Me? because he humbleth himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days." So that you see even in such a case as this, this sorrow was precious in God's sight; how much more then when it produces its proper fruit, even that of leading men to Christ for salvation, and to the Holy Spirit for assistance to lead a holy life. This is the reason why mourners for sin are blessed;—because they shall be comforted,—because they

are in the way towards comfort: they have begun well, and they will soon find One who will pardon the guilt which gives them such cause for grief, and put a new song in their mouths, even a song of thanksgiving to their God.

But do not, I beseech you, view this sorrow for sin as a thing only belonging to those who are just turning from dead works to serve the living God; the case is very different: as we are the creatures of sorrow through life in our outward circumstances, so are we in every step of the Christian life; we are continually finding fresh occasions for being shame-stricken and humbled before God; are continually grieved to see so much of the unsubdued and corrupt nature within us; and cut to the heart to think that we should be crucifying our Lord afresh by our rebellion against Him. And the more we feel all this,—the more pain it gives us,—the more we mourn for it,—the more blessed we are; for it shews that God is carrying on a blessed work in us, and leading us on by His grace, when we become so anxious to please Him, and to be conformed to the image of our Saviour. So you see, such mourning shews that we are in a blessed state, and the future inheritors of a blessing. And whoever you are that thus mourn, you shall be comforted; and the more and deeper your grief now, the more welcome and sweet will be the joy when it shall come; your burden of sin shall be removed from you, and you shall be like Jesus, for you shall see Him as He is.

Again, those who mourn *under afflicting dispensations of God's Providence*, provided that mourning be submissive, and not murmuring, are blessed. God intends us to mourn when He afflicts us. Not to do so, would shew a proud and perverse spirit, unwilling to acknowledge His hand. But we may mourn and yet submit; our tears may flow from the pressure of mere distress upon our souls, without any

repining thought. Such mourning our blessed Lord Himself hallowed often by His presence, and once by His example, when He wept over Lazarus. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities;—and let no man think for a moment that the religion of the Gospel checks the exercise of the social affections and feelings of the heart; it rather points out to them their proper designs and objects, and thus puts them into their best exercise. St. Paul, in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, exhorts them not to sorrow without hope for those who had departed, and gives them words wherewith to comfort one another.

Are there any of you who are mourning because God's hand is laid heavily upon you, because He has sent His ministers of disease or affliction into your houses? only take care that you sorrow after a godly sort, that you are not betrayed into doubting His love, or repining at His providence,—and by His authority *we pronounce you blessed*. Yes, blessed; although your heart and flesh seem to fail within you, and your spirits may be cast down very deep, and His sad visitations may be frequently repeated upon you, you are blessed, for you shall be comforted; all this is His way of preparing you to receive that comfort which He is preparing for you. Have you never heard that they whom the beloved apostle saw in white robes, with palms in their hands, had come *out of much tribulation*? Have you never heard that *whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth*? oh if you have the eternal weight of glory before you, and the love of God within you, you have indeed, both now and in prospect, exceeding great comfort,—comfort with which your present affliction is not to be compared.

Are there any here whom God has been pleased to deprive of one whom they have loved, and whose loss made a sad gap in their family circle, and a deep wound in their hearts? to you

this sound, "Blessed are they that mourn," must be precious indeed. If your mourning be that of persons fearing and loving God, viewing Him as a reconciled Father in Christ, and your bereavement as His correction, you are blessed also, for you shall be fully comforted; not only shall you meet your beloved departed ones who have died in the Lord,—but one day or other, when you will awake and see things as they are, this your loss will appear to you one of your greatest mercies; and while the presence of God and the Lamb is shining on you, and the harps of the angels are sounding about you, you will say, "Lord if thou hadst not sent me this my affliction, I never should have come to this blessed place."

Are there any here who are mourning because they are absent from their heavenly home, and confined in this mortal body, far from the joys which are at God's right hand,—who are weary and heavily laden, and longing for the day when they shall appear before God, when they shall wake up after his likeness, and be satisfied? O! that there were more such among us, for they are indeed happy mourners; they are in the condition of the Psalmist, who says in the fifty-fifth psalm, "Then I said, O that I had the wings of a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest," and of the blessed St. Paul, who says "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." You are indeed sure of being comforted; nay, your very sorrow itself carries comfort with it, for it causes you to look off from the things which distress the children of this world, and to be continually in the contemplation of the glory that shall be revealed in you; and your comfort shall be perfected hereafter, when the full enjoyment for which you have been hoping shall be abundantly ministered to you, and no man shall take your joy from you.

A few words to those who are enjoying security and worldly contentment. You are *no mourners*; you have no wish to be mourners; you think all such unhappy, and pray, if you ever pray, that it may never be with you as it is with them. But you can never be blessed till you be like them, for of such is the kingdom of God. Observe that Christ says "Blessed are the mourners, for they shall be comforted:" that is, those who have mourned and are comforted, are more blessed than they who have never mourned at all. So that you are losing a great blessing in order to retain a very small one, or rather, one that is really none at all; for some day you will find your fancied security give way under you, and then you will mourn indeed, when perhaps it will be too late to seek for comfort. If you say you have nothing to mourn for,—that God has not afflicted you, and therefore you cannot mourn,—I answer, so much the rather have you cause to humble yourselves, and to mourn before Him, for afflictions are the marks of His love, they are His tokens to His children; and if you have none of these, you may well doubt whether God beholds you as a father does the children whom he loves. Make your very security and want of affliction a cause of deep sorrow. "Before I was afflicted," says David, "I went astray, but now I keep thy commandments." You have plenty of cause, daily and hourly, for humiliation before God. "Turn ye even unto Me," saith the Lord, "with weeping, and mourning, and fasting, and praying:" and O take care that you do not delay this work of true repentance and godly sorrow, till He leave you to your false and miserable peace, to enjoy it while you may, and then be carried away without remedy.

Finally, may God give us grace, so to mourn, that we may be comforted; so to feel the weight of our sins here, and confess them before God, that we may be led by a sense

of our need of pardon to take Christ for our Saviour, who is the source of all mercy, and the God of comfort; and so to go softly, and in lowliness of spirit before God, and walk humbly with Him all our time here below, that we may rejoice in His presence hereafter, and walk with the nations of the redeemed in the light of His glory. Grant it, Heavenly Father, for Thy dear Son's sake. AMEN.

S E R M O N X.

“ BLESSED ARE THE MEEK : FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH.”
—*Matt. v. 5.*

WE have lately been led to notice, from this passage, the character of the religion of Christ, as encouraging tempers and habits of mind very different from those which usually gain reputation and celebrity in the world. We have seen how, under its influence, the poor in spirit and the mourners are blessed. We are now called to notice another class of persons equally unlikely, one would think, to be put in the foremost ranks, or thus pre-eminently favoured with a blessing—“Blessed are the meek.”

We will proceed then to examine what this meekness is. You may think, at a first view, that meekness and poverty of spirit are much the same; but there will appear a difference if we examine them closely. Poverty of spirit implies low and humble thoughts of one's self; meekness is a lowly and quiet demeanour and behaviour to others and towards God. Poverty of spirit has more to do with our thoughts; meekness with our actions. Poverty of spirit ensures our not being liable to pride; meekness, our not giving way to it. Meekness, therefore, extends to the government of our tempers, the controlling of all improper anger, all discontent, all contempt, all harshness shewn towards others, all murmuring against God or man. And as there is a difference in the nature of the excellence, so also is there in the blessing. The poor in spirit are blessed, because

theirs is the kingdom of heaven ; the meek are blessed, for they shall inherit the earth. Meekness is that part of godliness which has more particularly the promise of the life that now is. We will go through the points which we have noticed as belonging to meekness, and shew how this blessing pronounced by our Saviour is attached to each of them. The meek man governs his temper—he is at peace within himself—he has been led to see his need of, and to wish to imitate, his Saviour—he sees how ill it becomes one who has no strength in himself, but depends wholly on another, to let the overflowings of pride and self-justifying carry him away. He sees how ill it becomes one who professes a wish to be like his Saviour, to be betrayed into feelings which He never gave way to ; and to set an example so little resembling His, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again. He strives to attain the liberty of the children of God, and is therefore unwilling to be led captive by the lusts of his carnal mind. He wishes to enjoy God—and he sees that God looks to him who is of an humble spirit, and that the still small voice of His comforting promises is apt to be drowned by the stir and tumult of unruly passions. He loves communion with God ;—and he finds peace with men and an unruffled temper, the only paths to undisturbed and unhindered prayer. He hopes for future glory—and remembers that it is written, “ He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” Now, in all these points does he not truly inherit the earth ? Is not he the man whose enjoyment of life and of society, to say nothing more, is the most complete ? Where others seek quarrels, he spreads love and good will ; happy himself, and making all happy around him. He is the true possessor of empires, and the greatest conqueror, for it is written ; “ He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty ; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.” He only rules in his own body, and exercises dominion there ; and he only inherits the good

opinion and favour of all, in the only way in which it can be sought by a Christian; by preferring others in honour before himself, and, as much as lieth in him, living peaceably with all men. The meek man is courteous and respectful to all; does not make himself enemies by a contemptuous and haughty demeanour, but is gentle, and treats his fellow creatures as brethren. His Saviour died for all: how then can he bear to insult any? The meek man forgives injuries when real—for God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven him; and he thinks his own debt to God to be far greater than any that a fellow-creature can owe to him. Nor is he ready at fancying and hatching injuries out of unintentional expressions, looks, or accidents; for he seeks not offence, but peace and love. Is it not clear that this is the man who enjoys all the blessings of society, and the delights of intercourse with friends? Blessings await him at every turn of his life; the Lord shall make even his enemies to be at peace with him. If he have but little of this world's good for them who are about him, yet he is more blessed than many who abound; for "better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." He is poor, and yet better off than the rich—for it is written, "Better is it to be of an humble spirit with the lowly; than to divide the spoil with the proud." Moreover, the meek man is contented—the secret of true meekness is a sense of our own unworthiness of any of God's mercies; and therefore, to the meek man, every common blessing comes like a shower of gold—more than he deserved or expected. Here, indeed, is great gain,—godliness with contentment: the only end of every man's labour, and toil, and desire, is to have enough; but the meek man always has enough. Others are so taken up in the pursuit of riches, and pleasure, and vanity, that they have no time to look about them, and meditate joyfully on God's works of creation,—or within them, to burst into thankfulness for what he has done

for their souls. But the meek man goes on his way rejoicing ; within and without he has abundant cause for thankfulness ; he is thankful for a house to shelter him, a bed to rest him, food to nourish him, raiment to clothe and protect him, and friends to converse with and cheer him : but, above all, he is thankful for the blessings of grace, for God's house of prayer, His Word, His sacraments, His throne of grace always open to his supplications. Here then, too, he is the person who truly inherits the earth. Thousands of things which others pass by unnoticed, draw out his heart in thankfulness and joy : he finds treasures where others can perceive nothing valuable. The means of grace are to him full of precious improvement to his soul ; the book of providence is to him full of instruction and example ; and from the ever open book of creation, he is continually reading lessons which interest him, and give him joy to remember, and fill him with gratitude to the Creator.

But the highest blessedness of the meek, the highest sense in which he inherits the earth, is yet to be considered. He is at peace with himself, at peace with his neighbours, at peace with his lot ; but he is also AT PEACE WITH GOD.

And this lies at the root of the whole matter. Mistake not, I entreat you, the meekness of which I have been speaking for a mere worldly quality—a natural amiableness of disposition. The Christian knows of no virtues, no excellencies, except such as spring from *christian* motives ; other things are but valuable, as they tend to this. Except the cross of Christ be first taken up and borne—except the pardon of sin be first sought and obtained—there is no such thing as virtue, no such thing as piety, no such thing as humility or meekness. A man may be lowly and courteous, and forgiving, and slow to anger, and may master his temper and desires,—out of a mere regard to his character, or the custom of society, or the wish to please others ; it has been done, and is done every day, here and in heathen

lands alike. But this has nothing to do with the meekness of which I have been speaking; nay, the man who does thus in a christian land, is acting in opposition to God and disobedience to His will—for He has commanded him to act from one motive, and he chooses to go and act from another. God's command, His summary of all motives, for all actions, is, "Deny thyself, take up thy cross, and follow Christ:" *his* motive is, "Indulge thyself and follow gain." Darkness and light are not more distinct, than the meekness of such an one and that of which I speak. To return, the meek man of whom I am speaking, is at peace with God. This is the root of the matter. No one can be truly meek without it: for as long as men are sensible that God is against them, there always will be a certain lurking opposition to Him, which is the nourishing source of pride, discontent, and fretfulness under affliction. On the contrary, the meek man has learnt where to repose his trust—has put his soul out of his own keeping into that of his Saviour. If afflictions come, they come from his loving Father, who is purifying him, and trying the sincerity of his trust in Him; and therefore he does not murmur under them, for enduring afflictions is part of his blessing—"Blessed is he that endureth affliction, for when he is tried he shall receive a crown of glory." He is not liable to mistake God's chastisement for his wrath; but is kept in peace, and so has power given him to turn it to its right use. He is not liable to be over anxious or distressed about worldly matters; for his heavenly father who careth for the lilies of the field, will not neglect him. Do you not see how his blessing follows and haunts him, as it were, through every step of his life; how, in every thing, the true inheritance and enjoyment of God's favour belong to him?

But he has also another precious treasure, which is valuable enough to redeem a thousand losses, toils, and afflictions—a drop of honey mixed in every cup which his heavenly Father gives

him to drink—even the hope and certain expectation of future glory. *He only* inherits the earth as it ought to be inherited, or enjoys it as it should be enjoyed, who feels it not to be his rest, and looks for something beyond. If we make the soil of our earthly portion too rich, we shall have much labour to keep under the weeds that will spring in it. If we build our souls too splendid a mansion here below, we shall spend our resources in its repairs. It is only by regarding the earth as a state of passage to a better world, that we can provide for our real comfort or true enjoyment. This sense of the uncertainty of his stay here, makes the meek man be continually thinking of his other home, where he shall abide for ever—and the more this world changes, the more will he desire the next—the more he is hindered from his communion with Christ here, the more will he long for the state of eternal and undivided communion hereafter.

Thus truly does the meek man inherit the earth, and his inheritance of it is blessed—for all God's mercies are means of grace; and he who truly, in the spirit of meekness, *enjoys* most of them, will be found furthest advanced in the spiritual life, most zealous for his Saviour, and most ripe for His glory.

But, to whom do all these blessings belong? Think once more—to the MEEK. And who are they among us? Are they persons whom we all know—who stand forward among us and lead our little band in its journey to the promised country? No; they are concealed, humble, quiet, simple-hearted. We have considered three classes of persons who are blessed, the three first classes mentioned by our Lord, and strange to say, we have not found among them our forward professors of religion, our high-spirited ones that will not submit themselves, but follow ways of their own devising, and are not content to “stand in the old ways, and enquire for the ancient paths.” The poor in spirit—the mourners—the meek—such have been

our blessed ones as yet, and such they will continue to be : for God hath no delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, and a variety of services and unmeaning differences ; but His delight is in him that is of an humble and quiet spirit, and trembleth at His word.

And as I have warned you before, so let us take warning now again—not to despise any. Are they evidently not brethren in Christ ? by which I mean, are they living in open sin ? do they indulge in habitual, unchecked, and unrepented evil tempers ? do they, as a habit, take God's name in vain ? We must pray for them and be gentle with them. No one was ever despised or scolded into religion. This concerns our own meekness. Are any of doubtful character in this point, not saying much, backward to communicate about spiritual things ? Exercise towards them, I beseech you, that charity which hopeth all things,—and till very decided cause be given, do not set down any as the enemies of Christ. Take heed ye who are thus forward to judge, that you be not found, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, to have despised as worthless some of the LORD'S choicest jewels.

Finally, let us lay close to our hearts the great duty and blessedness of this truly christian habit of mind. We are not without an example, even the same in whom the other two shone so eminently—the Lord Jesus : “ Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me,” said He, “ for I am meek and lowly, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” His life is full of instances of meekness—His subjection to His parents, His coming to John for baptism, His checking the vindictive spirit of His apostles, when they wished to call down fire from heaven to consume His enemies, His patient endurance of insult, and cruelty, and death, when He had all things in His power, to have commanded them as he pleased ; all these are fit subjects of meditation to encourage a spirit of meekness. But, above

all, and especially at this season of Advent, let us be continually thinking on that great and principal instance of meekness—His incarnation in our flesh and birth into our world, as a helpless babe—He, who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, being found in the form of a servant.

I cannot repeat too often, that we cannot acquire this or any other christian grace without beginning with Christ, that is, without renouncing self dependence, and going about every thing we do in His power. We require spiritual strength of soil for our roots, before we can bring forth the fruits of righteousness to the praise of God. The barren fig tree was to be cured, not by attention to particular blossoms, but by digging about it and enriching the ground. Let us take care that we be stedfast in faith, joyful in hope, and rooted in love—for, if these things be in us and abound, they will make us that we be not barren nor unfruitful in the day of Jesus Christ. To this end we must be constant in prayer and in the reading of God's Word; for these are the ordinances in which we must look for His assisting Spirit, without which all is vain—both our exhorting to holiness and your striving after it.

May God grant us all His grace, that we may profit by our present meditation, that we may walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; gentle unto all men, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; that we may receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save our souls; with meekness give a reason of the hope that is in us: and being clothed with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, may at length be exalted to that blessed place, where the LORD will beautify the meek with salvation,—for His dear Son's sake. Amen.

S E R M O N X I .

“ BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH DO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER
RIGHTEOUSNESS: FOR THEY SHALL BE FILLED.”—*Matt.* v. 6.

THE three blessings which we have already considered, concerned the habit and temper of our minds, as regarded our thoughts of ourselves, or our behaviour towards others: the one contained in the text refers to the desires and affections, —for the spiritual religion of Christ will have our desires, as well as our tempers, subject to it, will not be content with holding out blessings for mere abstinence from offence, which poverty of spirit and meekness rather consist in, but will have a progress made towards perfection, by advances in active holiness. I need scarcely tell you that all these qualities here mentioned, and therefore their accompanying blessings, belong to one and the same character; that we might, instead of considering them separately, have seen how they all belong to, and flow out of, one another; how the poor in spirit, the mourner for sin, is necessarily meek, and hungers and thirsts after righteousness. This part of the subject we may treat on a future occasion, if God permit: meantime you will have no difficulty in seeing how all these *depriving* and *emptying* qualities of spirit should naturally lead it to require something to fill and sustain it; how poverty of spirit should breed a desire for spiritual riches; holy mourning for holy joy; meekness and patience under

injuries, for justice and right judgment. All these desires are comprehended in the expression "hungering and thirsting after righteousness;" and the peculiar blessing attributed to it by Christ is, that, contrary to most of the desires of men, it shall never fail of its end, but they who thus hunger and thirst shall be filled. We will trace it through its different branches and degrees, and endeavour to shew how this blessing accompanies it in all of them.

He who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, desires, in all his dealings and converse with men, that the strictest integrity and purity may be shewn; he desires to give his neighbour his strict right, in word as well as in deed, and his wish, (rather than his hope,) is, for the day when every man shall deal with his neighbour as in the presence of God, thus truly acting in the spirit of the petition, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Now, even in this, the lowest form of the desire, does not it meet with its accomplishment? Do not all men put confidence in him in whose lips there is found no guile, and who is true and just in all his dealings? And does not the selfishness and overreaching spirit of the world receive a check in his presence, and, at least while he is by, put on the appearance of disinterestedness and truth? Thus, in some measure, even here is his pious desire fulfilled. But it is not in the dealings between man and man that we must look for his reward, or suppose his endeavours after righteousness to rest. If it were so, he would fall short of his object, and his reward of its preciousness. His desire that God's will may be done begins in the world of his own heart, in that inward council chamber where schemes of action are formed, that great place of traffic, where so many men buy the world and lose their souls. He is anxious that there should be none but fair dealings *there*—that the worth of objects should not be estimated by their present desirableness to his passions, but by their

entire and well considered influence on the interests of his soul; not by the standard of man's varying judgment, but by the certain rule of God's unerring word. But he quickly finds that he is often deceived—that however careful he may be, his eyes are blinded by self-interest, and want of zeal for God, and a spirit of yielding to the world; and therefore it is to these defects that he applies his correcting hand. But he finds this work too great for him; it often baffles and defeats him: it may be easy to keep back the outward acting of our feelings, and call our hands back when we would have put them forward; but to turn inwards upon one's self, to set bounds to a rising desire, to call up that confidence in God and His truth, which may enable us to stand firmly against the solicitations of the world, out of the barren unbelief and unsteadiness of our hearts,—this the hungerer and thirster after righteousness may try in vain, unless he has been made partaker of a righteousness of a higher nature than his own. Besides which he will consider his frequent failures in these endeavours, not only as evidences of his want of strength, but as bars and hindrances to his success in future: he will set them down to the score of his sins, and his progress will rather be to despair, than to enjoyment of his desire after holiness—such a hunger and thirst as this cannot be filled, but must consume itself away in empty cravings. Thus we come to that point to which I led you in our other meditations on these divine texts, where I shewed you that it was only of *christian* humility, *christian* mourning, and *christian* meekness, that these blessings were pronounced. But now, what a rich feast opens before us for the hungry and thirsty soul! we are no longer confined to the duties and circumstances of our intercourse with our fellow men, nor are our desires fixed in the fulfilment of our relation to them merely, or the mere balancing and governing our own feelings and judgment according to the will of God's law: we are now

taught to look to One who has been made to us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption;—even to Christ, in Whom are contained all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, in Whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Now observe, as in the former cases, how every thing is altered. He who hungers and thirsts after righteousness is indeed blessed now. He has been received into the Church of Christ, which He hath purchased with His own blood—he can look on himself as one of His little ones, to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom. Instead of putting his progress towards holiness in the place of his Saviour's sacrifice, he makes *that* his foundation—he sees himself in Him crucified to the world, with Him risen unto God, and created anew unto good works. This new creation, this being received into the benefits and privileges of Christ's resurrection, is his ground of confidence and pillar of strength.

Now this his Saviour is made unto him *wisdom*—a right judgment in all things is His gift to His people, and comes to them not suddenly or with observation, but like all his gifts, in the course of humble striving after holiness; he who distrusted his own judgment and found himself continually going astray, now can judge rightly without fear: from his meditations on his Saviour's most holy life and blessed death, from this distrust of himself and looking to Him, he has learnt such lessons of heavenly meekness and discretion, that his spiritual sight is refined and sharpened, and we wonder how one who once, perhaps, fell indiscriminately on right and wrong alike,—now, by some marvellous power, is enabled to distinguish accurately the nicest difference of conduct; and, under the influence of that Spirit whose office is to guide into all truth, can mark out clearly his path of christian duty, through the obscure and tangled wilderness of this evil world. Here, then, his way to holiness is plain before him.

But Christ is also made to him *righteousness*. He is not only the blessed object of his thoughts, the means of clearing his spiritual sight, but also the pattern of his imitation—the very righteousness after which he strives. In hungering and thirsting after righteousness, he hungers and thirsts after Christ. His love to the fallen race of man, His condescension in taking our nature and submitting to be as a man, His cross and passion, His death and burial, His resurrection and ascension ;—these are the objects to which he endeavours to attain—continually striving that the same mind may be formed in him, which was also in Christ Jesus.

This same Christ is made unto him *sanctification*. The object of his meditation, the pattern of his imitation, is also the means whereby he is helped on towards it: it is not only his righteousness, but his holiness also. He has heard in Scripture of such a thing as the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, as the growing up to a perfect man in Christ: and therefore, he is not content with remaining always at the threshold of the spiritual life, doubting whether he may go in or not; but knowing that he may have boldness to enter in by the blood of Jesus, he goes boldly through the outer courts and those where the common daily sacrifices are offered, even to the holiest place of all, nothing fearing or doubting. Christ is made unto him sanctification—here is the promise fulfilled to him at once. The same blessed object who raised his desire is Himself the fulfiller of it—in Him are his hunger and thirst for righteousness, and in Him he shall be filled. But Christ is made unto him *redemption*—here is a greater fulness still. The enjoyment of his Saviour *here* is partial and interrupted, compared to that which awaits him after the change of his mortal body. Although he meets Him, even here, at every turn of his way,—although His example, His command, and the gratitude due to Him are ever being brought before him;

yet he longs for the time when he shall walk with Him as a man with his friend ; the blessedness of not having seen, and yet believed, does not hinder him from desiring to see Him as He is,—but rather makes him desire it the more, that he may hear that blessedness pronounced over him. The scanty fare of the wilderness will not satisfy him, but he hungers and thirsts after the rich feast of good things which the Lord will make at the day of His appearing. And doubt not that he shall be filled—for of that day and of that country it is written, that “ they shall not hunger any more, neither thirst any more—they shall have awoke up after Christ’s likeness, and be satisfied.”

And so we have risen from the lowest measures of this holy desire to its highest fulfilment. This blessing is larger and of more extent than the former ones, for as there is no limit to the treasures of righteousness, and wisdom, and sanctification, and redemption ; so neither is there to this hunger and thirst, nor to the enjoyment wherewith it shall be satisfied. But now let us turn to ourselves, and lay all this to our own hearts. What I have been telling you, are not things which may or may not be, things on which you are at liberty to have an opinion when you are asked for one, but act and live as if you had none ; but they are, and will be, either the life or the condemnation of every one of us here present. These blessings of our Saviour’s are like the pillar of cloud which divided Israel and Egypt of old ; they have a bright and a dark side—they are bright and full of comfort to those who believe in Him, but dark and full of terror to His enemies : how much worse then, if those very enemies be in His Church—if the light that is among us be darkness to any of us. Beloved, let us not think such things of you,—but let us stir each other up to this blessed hunger and thirst after righteousness. Fulness is set before us ; there is none to make us afraid or to stint us ; opportunities for gratifying it are ever at hand : God’s creation is ever before us, sanctified to our use

by the death and resurrection of Christ;—the things that lie about us are full of subjects of meditation and instruction in righteousness. In our daily conversation, our turning about in the world, we may constantly find occasions of glorifying our Saviour; and let those who are living a spiritual life in Christ, beware that they be not led by any temptation of inward pride to despise and set aside these humble ministers of His providence and ordinances of grace. “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.” And truly in our spiritual Church, in these our solemn times of worship, in our offerings of prayer and praise, and our reading of the Word, we may come and with joy may draw water out of the wells of salvation. And above all, in that sacred feast of the body and blood of the Lord to which I often bid you in His name, He sets before us freely to partake, by faith, of that which prophets and kings desired, and have not attained unto. But let it be our care, to whatever source we apply for the relief of our spiritual wants, to apply in faith, nothing doubting—that is, to come as part of Christ’s flock, and inheritors of His kingdom; for this, and this only, is that faith by the victory of which we overcome the world; and which enables us to put forth our hands, and take freely of the tree of life. Till this faith be in us, we may strive, but we cannot attain; our own imperfections and sins, instead of making us long for glory, will make us doubt our acceptance with God,—the very end for which our tempter is labouring: our hunger and thirst will not be after righteousness, but will spend itself in an idle and sinful curiosity of enquiry into God’s unsearchable purposes—and our works for God will not be done from the love by which faith is shewn, but from a vague imperfect sense of duty, weaker as a motive than even the striving after salvation of the self righteous and self-confiding. All such mistrust and unbelief let us carefully avoid, and pray

God, whatever we fall into, to keep us from doubting in this matter of the life and death of our souls.

And may He grant that we all may so strive, that we may get the mastery—so run that we may obtain—so hunger and thirst after righteousness, that we may be filled.

SERMON XII.

“ BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL : FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY.”—
Matt. v. 7.

Many of the benefits which we ask at the hands of God, are by our Saviour connected with our own granting them in our turn to our fellow creatures ; not that the act of doing so is in itself any claim to the favour of God, any more than any other of our acts, but because it is an evidence of a temper of mind which indicates, in him who possesses it, a state of acceptance with God. If we do not forgive, we cannot expect to be forgiven—because an unforgiving spirit cannot bear rule in the breast of him who has been led to see his own need of pardon, and to place his dependence on Christ as a Saviour, and endeavour to adorn His doctrine in all things. In this same manner it is said in the text, that the merciful are blessed, for they shall obtain mercy. A truly merciful spirit is a sign of that low opinion of self, and sense of gratitude to Christ, which belongs to those who shall obtain mercy of God.

That this is the sense, is manifest from other passages of Scripture, in which we are exhorted to be charitable and merciful ; not *that* we *may* obtain mercy, but *because* we *have* obtained mercy. Christ Himself elsewhere says, “ Freely ye have received, freely give ; ” and St. Paul exhorts, “ forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” And in the parable of the unmerciful servant, the words with

which his master reproaches him are, “O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me : shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant ?” I have mentioned this before passing to the other senses of the promises in the text, lest while I am treating of them, any of you should have considered wrongly this its highest sense.

Let us now then consider the character of the merciful man, and the blessedness of it. Surely, you will say, this blessing only belongs to princes, and judges, and magistrates,—to those who have the lives or families of others in their power, or have large sums to distribute in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked ;—surely this blessing cannot concern us, who have no power over others,—who are not lifted into any responsible situation ;—we are not judges or rulers over our neighbours, and therefore, what does the duty of being merciful concern us ?

Brethren, it concerns us much :—every one of us, even the most retired and lowly among us, is constantly called upon to exercise mercy. Not to mention the calls we have upon us from those creatures, which by God’s appointment, serve us and minister to our wants,—the constitution of human society has put the character and the comfort of our neighbours very much in our power. Our thoughts of them and our words respecting them, are often very material parts of either their joy or their sorrow. The merciful man, then, to begin at the root of the tree, is merciful in his *thoughts* of others. He would rather keep out of view, if possible, that dark side of a thing of which so many are fond—giving credit, in all cases which will admit of it, for christian motives. And he does this even at the risk of being esteemed shortsighted, and dull in seeing characters ; for his aim is, not to be thought clever, but to be a christian. He checks the rising of uncharitable thoughts in his heart,—he

prays against them, and wishes to think of others as he would they should think of him. When all have despaired of a person, the merciful man is the last to give him up : he knows (for he has felt) the long-suffering of God, he knows our ignorance of each other, and even of ourselves,—and therefore he will judge nothing before the time, till the Lord come. He is also merciful in his words about others. He knows that an ill word of any one, an evil surmise respecting them, when once spoken, can never be recalled—but quickly spreads among the idle lovers of vain talking who abound every where ; gaining in every mouth it passes through, till it come, perhaps, to the ears of the injured person, or of those whom he loves more than himself, or of those on whom his welfare depends, swelled into a serious charge against him, and the cause perhaps to him of very much undeserved misery. He remembers how great a matter a little fire kindleth ; and therefore sets a watch over the door of his lips, that he offend not with his tongue. Thus anxiously does he watch over that charge which God has committed to all in society—and thus rightly does he administer the power which is given to the lowest, over the highest among men.

But thoughts and words are not the whole of his life, nor the half of his christianity. His exercise of mercy extends it to those more solid and substantial proofs of it, which are the fruits of its health and growth. He is merciful in deed to others : he is careful to do nothing that may wound the feelings or hinder the faith of any. He consults even the prejudices and whims of others, and denies himself, if he think he is indulging in anything that may offend them. In his worldly dealings with them he is not exacting or over-straining, but gives in as much as he can. Are any sick or needy ? he comforts them after his power ; silver and gold he may have none, but such as he has he gives them,—his presence to comfort them, his ad-

vice to benefit them, his prayers to help them. And the truly merciful man does not rest with doing good to the bodies of his fellow men—but endeavours, by God's blessing, to be merciful to their souls also: this is true christian mercy—to snatch a poor perishing sinner from death, and lead him to Jesus Christ: this is the true mercy, because it is not seen of men—because his motive is the will of God—his only witness the presence of God—and his success in the hands of God. He may have much unpleasantness, much that is discouraging to go through; but he has learnt to be merciful like his heavenly Father, and he now learns to be long-suffering like Him also,—patient, not easily defeated, but persisting unto the end in endeavouring to rescue the poor deluded sinner from the grasp of the enemy, and place him in a sure refuge. This, brethren, we may all of us do—those about us and our acquaintances are all so many trusts committed by God to us, to bring to the knowledge of Himself. By reminding them of their need of a Saviour and the value of their immortal souls, we are doing them the greatest kindness—being truly merciful to them. He is moreover merciful in entering into and attending to the wants of others—not shutting himself up in selfishness, imagining that every one has but himself to care for; but sharing his lot with those about him, and endeavouring to gladden their hearts by taking an interest in their wishes and schemes.

Now need I explain to you how this character calls down a blessing on it wherever it is found, in whatever rank of life or situation? Need I say how, even in this world, which is not the place of recompense, the merciful obtain mercy—how they let their light shine and glorify their heavenly Father, and so prepare the Lord's way, by turning the disobedient to the wisdom of the just? how they become blessed in their own souls, by the holy and heavenly frame of mind which this habit of shewing mercy produces? how kindness on their part, begets

kindness in others towards them ; and from gently dealing with others, they are gently dealt with themselves ; thus truly obtaining mercy, according to the promise ?

But as before, so now, we must go deeper into the heart, and see whence the merciful man gets this his disposition, and what is his motive towards exercising it. And as we have always found, so we shall find now, that this disposition comes direct from the gospel of Christ. He may be naturally of a merciful disposition : let him bless God for it, and use it as a furtherance in His work and labour of love. But remember, that only those dispositions and those actions are acceptable to God, which spring from an unfeigned intelligent belief in what Christ has done for us, and a sense of our obligations to Him. A naturally compassionate disposition is no more acceptable to God, till it be thus sanctified, than natural strength or beauty of body. And not only is the love of Christ the only motive which God will accept, but it is also the only one sure to produce the effect,—the only one upon which we can depend that it will not be set aside by circumstances or self interest, but will continue, in spite of our own corruption, and the hindrances of a wicked world. O happy indeed is he into whose heart his Saviour's love has sunk so deep, as to spread within him this heavenly grace of a pitiful, a courteous spirit;—a spirit which leads him to weep with them that weep, and mourn with them that mourn,—to view God as his Father, and all the Church of Christ as his brethren and sisters, members of one family, and inheritors of one home. O happy indeed would that Church be, if we were all of this mind—if we felt ourselves to be one body in Christ, and members one of another,—if a wound given to any member of it afflicted the whole—if we bore one another's burdens, and so fulfilled the law of Christ. How gladly should we travel on to our rest, and anticipate it by the way, if this were the case—how joyfully should we meet

here in our earthly sanctuary, our tabernacle in the wilderness, to acknowledge the hand of our Lord God in all the way that he is leading us. What fervent wishes and warm devotion would ascend up to God when, in that wonderful service, the Litany, we make mention before Him of all members of His Church, in all circumstances, from the least to the greatest,—from the Queen on her throne, to the desolate and oppressed, the prisoners and captives. We should not have the chilling and melancholy reflection to make, when the faint answers at the end of the petitions seem to tell us, that three-fourths of the congregation have no fervent wish for it to be granted,—that the voices which we then hear, pitifully few as they are, are perhaps more than the hearts engaged with us in the blessed work of mercy: for here, as always, blessed are the merciful,—here, as always, they shall obtain mercy,—and the merciful are those who deeply feel and heartily beseech the good Lord to hear us, when we recount the distresses, and ignorance, and sins of the members of His Church, and pray that they may be healed.

Are we not all baptized into one faith? do we not inherit the same blessing? are we not all partakers of the same bread and the same cup? have we not all the same hope? O then let us be of the same mind and think, the same thing: let us lift up the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees; let us be diligent in building up one another in our most holy faith. Let us lay aside wrath, and bitterness, and evil speaking; but above all, let us lay aside pride—that is the bar to our union—that prevents us from exercising the offices of christian love to one another. Beloved, we have none of us any thing that we have not received; let us not, then, boast one against another: the Church has plenty of enemies, the storm beats hard upon her from without: surely, surely, we have a better employment, than by hard and unmerciful conduct to be dividing her against herself. O I would to God that we could often meet to exhort

one another, and press these points—that we were more given to drawing together to share our common hopes and fears—that we had something more constantly to hold up to us our blessed and adorable Saviour, walking meekly in all endurance, through scorn, through buffeting, through sufferings even unto death, quiet, gentle, merciful, full of grace, full of prayer, full of humility and patience. But it seems that it must be so—the cold hearted custom of the world has bound us down in formality and hypocrisy; we have no zeal for God, no heart for heaven; and those who love the Lord and His service, must take to their knees and their closets, and pray for better days. The humility of the poor in spirit, the gentleness of the meek, the subdued carriage of the mourners for sin, the eager desire of the hungerers and thirsters after righteousness, the compassionate heart of the merciful, seem to be things which belong to some other age, or some other place than our own; they seem most scarce among us—and when we name the opposites to them, the overbearing spirit of the proud, the unhallowed discord of carnal joy, the haughtiness of the fretful, the cold heartedness of those who have no desire for God, and the closed heart of the unpitying; we speak of things which meet and grieve us at every turn in this christian land. This I attribute to the general neglect of prayer, private, family, and public, but especially these two latter, which have the effect beyond any thing I know, of uniting our hearts together and making us one in Christ. Oh let us strive to stay our steps in the downward progress to irreligion and forgetfulness of God, which I fear people in general are making. Let us stand in the old ways and enquire after the old paths, and turn unto the Lord with all our hearts. And let us make provision, under God's blessing, for the continuance of His people among us, by training up the little ones of the flock in His faith, and fear, and knowledge of their Saviour, and godly simplicity, and love

of all good works ;—that being found in this work of mercy, we may be blessed with the merciful.

I dismiss you with the words of St. Paul ; “ Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering ; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any : even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body ; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.”

SERMON XIII.

“ BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART : FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD.”—
Matt. v. 8.

WHEN Christ set a little child in the midst of His disciples as a pattern to them what manner of spirit they were to be of, He thereby pointed out to them several dispositions and tempers which must be exercised by His followers. As He teaches us to follow the meekness and simplicity of children, so also does He their purity. We must be simple in our intentions, single in our purposes: not dividing our affections between two masters, but wholly on God's side, set entirely to serve and please Him. This simplicity also requires that we be not ready to suspect evil of others, and at the same time most watchful against it ourselves; that we be, as the apostle expresses it, “blameless and harmless, the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.” Now such a simplicity as this implies purity of heart. A corrupt fountain cannot send forth sweet waters. The poverty of spirit, the meekness, the desire after righteousness, the merciful disposition which we have before considered, all spring out of this purity of heart. This is expressly stated by St. James: “the wisdom that is from above is *first pure*, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” Impurity of

thought, is sure to shew itself in the words and in the life of a man. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and the hand worketh; and he that attempts to maintain a consistent course of action without having fixed principles in his heart, may be assured that sometime or other his hypocrisy will betray itself. Purity of heart, then, lies at the root of true earnestness in the service of Christ; but forasmuch as we are all full of imperfection, and cannot command our hearts to be pure at our will, but must be continually striving to attain this blessed state,—purity of heart is represented as a christian grace of itself, a work in which there is a progress, and the exercise and practice of which carries a blessing with it. Let us then consider in what it consists, and of what sort is the blessing attached to it. In the first place then, that we may lay our our foundation rightly, there can be no purity of heart without faith in the redemption which Christ has wrought for us; for all holiness is the work of the blessed Spirit on the souls of those who are in a state of union with Christ. There can be no desire of holiness till this union have taken place; for the natural man has no discernment either of the need or of the nature of purity. Offences against public order he may avoid, for fear of punishment, or for expediency's sake—open acts of sin he may abstain from, out of a regard to his own interests; nay, he may even see the necessity of checking the risings of evil desires in his mind, but it is only on account of the results which he fears from them; but of the duty of holiness out of gratitude and love to his Saviour, the only motive of all christian duties, he neither has nor can have any idea.

And the christian's purity of heart consists, first, in an entire and unmixed devotion of himself to his heavenly Master; setting aside worldly motives and selfish ends, and endeavouring to rid himself of every thing which hinders him from being like Him. There are many thoughts which we are apt to in-

dulge in, which belong to this last mentioned list. All covetous thoughts are among the very foremost : “ the love of money is the root of all evil,” and the christian will soon find that the love of money and the love of God are affections that will not and cannot exist together ; he must either let go one or the other. There is nothing hinders his enjoyment of God, his progress in holiness, or his communion with God in prayer, so much as this. All of us, under whatever circumstances we may be, feel it a drawback upon us ; but it will go very hard with those who are under the influence of it, so as to let it be a ruling motive in their actions, This is the first and great bar to purity of heart.

And the next to this, or rather the same under a more general form, is the allowing any thing in this world to divide our affections or draw them from Christ. If we think of any thing more than of Him, allow any thing to draw us away from our duty to Him, in however slight a degree, our Tempter will lay hold of it, and make it an engine of assault to our souls. In our times of doubt and difficulty he will present it before us, to try to persuade us we have no hope in Christ : in our times of pouring out our hearts before God in prayer, he will be ready with this same stumbling block to place before us, to obstruct our spiritual sight, to hinder our faith, and to cool our love. He who would be pure in heart knows this, and therefore he is careful to let all his schemes and his attachments be formed with a reference to Christ, and with a single view to His glory.

Another set of thoughts to be checked are, hard thoughts of God. A few minutes' indulgence in such thoughts will damp our christian zeal and hinder our prayers, for we know not how long ; for they fix and root themselves in the heart, and take such hold of our minds, that it is long before we can banish them from us, and be as we were before they arose within us.

I scarcely need mention how purity of heart is opposed and

hindered, by giving way to thoughts which are strictly speaking, impure. But one thing I will say; so enticing are they; that unless resisted promptly at their very first suggestion, they are nearly sure to gain the mastery over us; and when they have done so, their effect is like the last mentioned; not only during their continuance are we resisting the Spirit of God, but we are letting in a flood of mischief on our souls, whose injury will long survive its presence. In this work, as well as in the rest of our christian trial, we are like men striving against a strong stream, every moment that we relax our efforts, we are carried rapidly backwards. Purity of heart, then, comes not without strong endeavours and a great struggle; and what are the means of attaining it?

First and most important among them is earnest prayer. Nothing acts so much on the heart as this; when we are brought into the immediate presence of God, our fear of offending Him is increased, our desires after holiness quickened, our faith in Christ strengthened. His public ordinances, His merciful appointments of family and (above all in this matter,) of secret prayer, are all so many fountains of purity, whence we may be refreshed and cleansed. Those who desire to be pure in heart are often in prayer,—often I mean in *actual* prayer—for they are always in the *spirit* of prayer. They find these times particularly useful and delightful to them; they find they return from them into the world with fresh strength, to contend against the pollution that is in the world through sin.

Another great help to purity of heart is, the continual study of God's Word: there every thing is pure—"wherewithal," says David, "shall a young man cleanse his way? even by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word." And he also testifies that "the undefiled in the way are they that walk in the law of the Lord." And though he who desires purity will

study the whole law of God, he will more especially make his delight, and lay to heart, those parts of the Scripture which relate the wonderful love of God in sending His Son, that blessed Lamb without blemish or spot, Who was separate from sinners, holy, harmless, and undefiled. The redemption wrought by Him and in Him, will be his great subject and the theme of all his praise. Moreover, he will love to look upon himself as in Christ, to look upon Christ as made to him his wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

This leads us to consider another great means of inward purification,—the hope of glory with Christ hereafter. “Every man who hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as He is pure.” And why? Because the time of future glorification will be the time of beholding Christ; the blessing of it will be being in the likeness of Christ: and therefore, the more he meditates on this, the more his knowledge of and desire after that likeness is increased;—as St. Paul saith, “We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of God.”

But, in considering the means of acquiring it, we have come to the blessing attending it—“Blessed are the pure in heart: *for they shall see God.*” This is indeed a high, glorious, and comprehensive blessing; the worth of it is inestimable; for one sight of the glories of Jehovah in Christ, as the ransomed soul wishes to see Him, will be more than enough to balance a long life of toil and pain; yea, will work a change on the spirit, which is beyond our limited conception. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

But this blessing has the promise of this life, as well as of that which is to come. God is purity, and therefore, those who

are increasing in purity are becoming like Him : God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all ; the strivers after purity are called the children of light ; they are daily, as they advance in their holy work of inward purification, blest by the light of the presence of His Spirit—that Spirit which, we are told, takes of the things of Christ, and shews them unto us ; that Spirit which is all powerful to dispel the darkness of our souls, to enlighten the spiritual understanding, to quicken the conscience, to manifest the most secret sins, by putting them in the light of His countenance. Thus then they continually increase in the knowledge of God ; and even in this poor blind state, they may be said to have a sight of Him—not in occasional glimpses or ecstasies, not in particular frames of mind or extraordinary manifestations ; but in their quiet steady progress towards holiness and towards the likeness of God. They increase also in their knowledge of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and become thus better able to meditate on the love of Christ who gave Himself a ransom for the sins of the world. Moreover, as worldly motives and corrupt affections lose their hold on the heart, they see the majesty and glory of God opening before them ; they begin to see further into the mystery of redemption, to see how it behoved Christ to suffer, and enter into His glory ; and to enter somewhat into the meaning of that comprehensive and wonderful sentence, “ For this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.” Observe how in Scripture, purity of heart is described as the way to spiritual knowledge,—“ Who shall ascend up into the hill of the Lord,” says the Psalmist, “ or, who shall stand in His holy place ? Even he that hath clean hands and a pure heart.” And again, “ Whoso ordereth his conversation aright, to him will I shew the salvation of God.”

Thus have I set before you the excellence and the blessing

which attends it, a spiritual excellence and a spiritual blessing. But who, you will say, can attain such a state as is here described? is it of any use to describe and set forth to us such high models of imitation, when we find it the work of a life to subdue one unholy lust, to check one improper desire? Brethren, blame me not;—I only speak the words and follow the example of Him who said, “Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” The effect of setting out before you so lofty a pattern to imitate, should not be to discourage you, but rather to urge you forward in your Christian course.

And, thanks be to God, the blessing which belongs to purity of heart does not belong only to the perfectly pure, for then would none among us inherit it, but it accompanies those who strive after it from their first attempt all through, increasing as they go on. It is not reserved till we reach a certain step in the holy progress, and then bestowed; but when we begin to seek Christian purity, that moment we find the blessing; there never was a person who in God’s strength, and in God’s appointed way, became conqueror over an impure or worldly temptation, who was not increased in spiritual strength and knowledge on account of it. Let none, therefore, think that the work which I have been speaking of is too high or too difficult an one for them. Brethren, this is an unchristian way of viewing the subject. Hear what the Apostle says, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me;” so that our source of strength is one and the same for all; and we are all on an equality as respects our strength in *ourselves*,—we none of us have any. Begin then, I beseech you, ye of Christ’s visible flock, ye who have been baptized into His death and become partakers of His resurrection, to walk in newness of life, to examine your own thoughts and motives, and try whether they be undefiled before God. Begin with prayer, any whatever you do, pray always; it is your chief defence

SERMON XIII.

against the attacks of your spiritual and impure foes. You desire to see God; you strive after His likeness: study then His holy Word, and especially the character of Christ as there manifested to us, and meditate on the wonders of redemption, and the blessings brought to you by it, and the exaltation and glory of Christ; and these, by taking possession of the thoughts of your hearts, shall drive out worldly impurities; your new desire will expel the old ones, and that will be, to be changed into the image of Christ, and finally to behold His face in glory.

Begin this holy work, I beseech you, without delay. For it ill befits servants of Christ to be unprepared for their Master's bidding, as you assuredly will if He should send for you before this be begun. Regard yourselves as ever in the presence of God, accustom yourselves to consider your thoughts as deeds; when reproving yourself for wrong thoughts, say not what am I *thinking*? but what am I *doing*? for thus it is that God regards them.

Oh may He grant my prayer for you, that ye may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding: that ye may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God: that ye being pure in heart may inherit the blessing prepared for such,—that of seeing the Lord.

SERMON XIV.

“BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS, FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD.”—*St. Matt. v. 9.*

WHEN the heavenly host appeared to the shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem, to announce the birth of our Redeemer, perhaps their joyful tidings was, PEACE ON EARTH. The gospel is the religion of peace; wherever its true influence prevails, it promotes and sets forward gentleness and quietness. The servant of the Lord must not strive, says St. Paul, describing the duties of a Christian minister. And most aptly does this blessing come after that belonging to the pure in heart. The wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable. But this duty is perhaps attended with more difficulties than any of the others which we have considered. There are many men with whom it is impossible to make peace, if we would; many with whom it would be wrong to be at peace, if we could. And, therefore, we find the duty of peaceableness laid down in the gospel with a qualification. St Paul says, “*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men;*” and the expression in the text, “blessed are the *peacemakers,*” seems to imply that peace is not easily found; that it is not the usual state of things in the world; that the children of God make it around them, and by their influence spread it abroad; and that it is not the natural growth of human nature. Need we look far to see instances of it? Where can we cast our eyes, or

our thoughts, that we do not see neighbour with neighbour, nay, often the members of the same family, falling out and making discord and enmity? where can we look that we do not see the seeds of malice springing up in the heart of men; where there are not open quarrels existing? yet we hear people depreciating one another, using spiteful words of another's character, insinuating evil things of others, all which are just as true signs of enmity at heart as an open and avowed breach between the parties. Brethren, none of these last mentioned acts, none of the dispositions which occasion them, belong to the children of God. They are marks of carnal bondage to the fleshly body, not of the glorious liberty of the sons of God. They belong to persons who have set their rest and built their home in the pride and vanity of the world; not to those who are seeking after a better and a heavenly country. He who is united to Christ, who is living to Christ in the world, and striving after conformity to Him, is a peacemaker.

Now, give me your attention while I endeavour to lay before you some of the points in which this peacemaking spirit will shew itself. I shall place first, because it is a thing hardly regarded as a Christian duty, by many who are called Christians in these times, strict, conscientious, and undeviating obedience to the authorities by which the peace of human society is preserved; and the promotion of such obedience within the whole circle of our influence. This is the lowest form of the duty; for it is rather abstaining from creating disturbance than making peace,—which, however, may almost be called making peace, when the business of so many is to make disturbance. But, however inadequate a peacemaker a person who merely observes the laws of the land is, it is indispensably necessary to his bearing the character at all, that he should do so. And I mention this, the rather because a strange and monstrous

opinion has been suggested by the Devil to men's minds in these our days, that they may be servants of Christ, and yet despise and disobey the authority of those whom He has set over them. He that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. There is no surer way of lending a hand to promote discord in Society than to set the example of contempt of those ordinances by which the peace of society is secured. And, therefore, the peacemaker in his great work of setting forward, as much as in him lies, quietness, peace, and love among all Christian people, is most careful in his own person to pay all deference and respect to human laws; thus shewing that He is anxious for peace, by affording none, in his public character as a member of Christian society, matter of quarrel against him. But as obedience to human laws is not his great work, but forms a part of his obedience to the law of Christ, so his abstinence from offending against peace, goes further than human laws prescribe; it extends to those common dealings between man and man in which jealousies and quarrels so often arise. In these he is careful not to give offence by hastiness, ill temper, overreaching another, or taking any advantage of his failings; and should the offence be given by another, he is not easily provoked, not ready to take affront at a word or a slight put on him, for he knows that from such habits dissension ensues oftener than peace. In his own family he observes the same conciliating manner and temper, avoiding by every means in his power, the breaking out of a quarrel, or, what is infinitely worse, the nourishment of secret malice, rather letting his pride be wounded, which is good for him, than his temper ruffled, which is most hurtful to his soul. And because he finds that this is a matter in which he must play the hypocrite, that angry thoughts in the heart will make themselves a way out in violent words, or hasty and intemperate actions, he begins by pacifying his thoughts, making them quiet, and

gentle, and peaceable, not apt to stir within him at every little slight or provocation, but long suffering, and easy to be in-treated.

But this last is a comprehensive and a difficult work. For, as I have here stated it, he might as well try to turn the sun from his course as to work this mighty change in his spirit. I have purposely come to this difficulty to shew you, as in the former instances, how utterly vain is the attempt undertaken merely as men, and in our own strength to arrive at any of the blessed states of mind described here by our Lord. You see that even in the lowest form of this duty, we are stopped at a certain point as before. What is called our natural character, may be one averse from strife and fond of peace, and all that I have mentioned up to this point we engage and delight in ; but it will be imperfectly and uncertainly done, and any extraordinary occasion which overcomes our gentleness of disposition, will cause us to leave our character of lovers of peace, and become promoters of confusion. Now all this takes place even in the *lowest* form of the duty, that only of avoiding quarrel ourselves. We must betake ourselves then at once to the gospel of Christ for strength to go on with this work, and the disposition truly to begin it. That gospel teaches that we are made partakers of Christ, made complete in him, and teaches us as we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, (or *for our Lord*,) even so to walk in Him ; conformity to Him is the great business of the Christian's conduct in life. In Him he has strength and guidance ; He is made unto him sanctification and wisdom ; he is led to view himself as created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works ; as bound, in fact, as created, to glorify him ; and he sees His bright example before him wherever he turns, and His word shining about him to direct him in the way. Now, how sure and steady will be his endeavours after peace, yes, and his victory over his own thoughts

and desires too ; for the spirit of Him who knows what is in man dwells in him, enlightning the dark chamber within him, and enabling him to cast out every thing that offendeth, and every root of bitterness. Now, by means of this change, this new direction of the thoughts and affections, we come to the higher form of the duty,—that of *making* peace, of healing the breaches which are made in Christian unity. As the office of healing others is higher than that of merely preserving health in ourselves, so is this method of making peace than those which we have been considering. There are many occasions in every man's life, on which the duty of making peace between contending parties is most urgent upon him ; and a person influenced by Christian motives, will take all these opportunities of glorifying his Saviour, and shewing the influence on himself, and all around him, of the gospel which he professes. I know it is a hard duty, and one in the exercise of which much ill will may be incurred, and dislike earned ; but this is not enough to make the Christian shrink from the duty. Besides, much of this is owing to the manner in which attempts at conciliation are often made. The servant of Christ, as he makes peace, also does it in a peaceable way and manner, not hastily, or as assuming anything to himself, but humbly and gently. He must expect trials in doing it, for in what Christian duty are there not trials ? And this will be his trial, that he will be accused of taking too much upon himself, and wishing to be better than his neighbours. This was the case when Moses saw two of his brethren at variance, and attempted to separate them ;—the one that did the wrong said, “ Who made thee a judge or ruler over us ? ” But there will come a day, even in this life, when the righteousness and pure motives of the servant of God shall be manifest ; his heavenly Father will not let him be put to shame before men ; his light shall so shine before them that they shall glorify his Saviour in

Whose strength he doeth all his work and labour of love. He shall be acknowledged as the child of God, and that God Whom he serves, shall be acknowledged by men; and from his influence, and the blessed effects of his loving and peace-making spirit, shall arise a harvest of glory to the Lord in the acknowledgment of the work of His Spirit on his heart, and the winning of many to see what is required of them as the redeemed of Christ. This is the fruit of righteousness which is said to be sown in peace by them that make peace,

Let me then exhort you as a part, and a very important one of your Christian calling, to undertake the blessed work of peace-making. It is first to be begun in yourselves, and your own matters,—for it is not for him that is living in enmity himself to endeavour to reconcile others, or to see the way to do it, till he have had experience in his own matters. Besides, it will be continually cast in his teeth, and will be an effectual hindrance to his doing good around him. Begin then in humility and prayer, by renouncing this temptation of the flesh in your own persons, making reparation to all whom you have injured, and forgiving from your hearts all who have injured you, and endeavouring to promote a like spirit on those around you, and over whom you have any influence. So shall ye be the children of your Father which is in heaven, and the members of your Redeemer, Who is the Author and Prince of peace.

I cannot dismiss this subject, without reminding you how frequently a peaceable and a quiet spirit is recommended and enforced on those who profess to be united to the Lord Jesus Christ. How earnestly does our Lord pray in His petition for His Church, that they all may be one, that the world may know that Christ is sent of the Father, and acknowledge Him. Nothing shews forth the beauty and glory of Christ so much as unity among Christians; nothing brings greater shame and

discredit on the profession of His religion than divisions among them. Let no minor considerations, no trifling objections, be the means of leading you to break the beauty and unity of that Church which Christ has purchased with His own blood to be holy and blameless in Him. Whatever your duties may be to men in general, those to your fellow-members in Christ, and fellow-citizens of His heavenly kingdom, are the most important. "Put away," says the Apostle to his converts, "from among you, all wrath, and bitterness, and clamour, and evil speaking." Let there not be the sound heard among us of an angry word, or a contentious spirit.

May you have grace to see how this duty of peace-making presses upon you in the capacity of members of Christ ; how it glorifies your Saviour ; and as you pray to be forgiven as you forgive others, so may you promote peace among others, as you wish to be found of your Saviour in peace at the day of His coming. So shall you be called, and be, the children of God ; and see the blessed fruit of your labours, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and you enter on your glorious inheritance,

S E R M O N X V .

“BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS’ SAKE: FOR THEIR’S IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. BLESSED ARE YE, WHEN MEN SHALL REVILE YOU, AND PERSECUTE YOU, AND SHALL SAY ALL MANNER OF EVIL AGAINST YOU FALSELY, FOR MY SAKE. REJOICE, AND BE EXCEEDING GLAD ; FOR GREAT IS YOUR REWARD IN HEAVEN: FOR SO PERSECUTED THEY THE PROPHETS WHICH WERE BEFORE YOU.”—*St. Matt.* v. 10, 11, 12.

BESIDES the blessings which are poured into the cup of Christ’s people, on account of those graces which he plants in their hearts, there are others coming from the natural and necessary temper of others towards them, and the situation of affairs with respect to them.

Now, they are described as a peculiar, a separated people ; as citizens of a kingdom which is situated in another country, and having their affections fixed, and their rule of conduct laid down, not here, but in a place far away. Moreover, it is said that they are not conformed to the world in which they live, that they not only do not run with its inhabitants to that excess of riot and surfeiting ; but that they do not, even in things seemingly innocent, suffer their hearts to be bound down to this lower world. Nor is this all :—they are transformed in the image of their minds, they are all united by faith to one living Head—even the Lord Jesus ; and are all members of His body. They are begotten anew in Christ, and therefore they have lost their relish and taste for the old and cast off things of this vain world. What, then, is the consequence ? The

children of the world, those who are living well contented to enjoy their present life, and caring for nothing beyond, think it strange that there should be those among them, who do not care for the life of which they make so much; and more than this,—they are moved by their holy and constant lives, to envy them, and to endeavour to remove them, if possible, out of the way; for their own evil deeds cannot abide the light of truth and justice which these persons, by their presence, cast upon them. This same motive leads them also to speak evil of the saints of God, and to endeavour to reduce them down to their own level, that they may be able to carry on their bad practices, without the purity of the christian character ever giving warning to them to consider their path, and amend their ways. And add to all these reasons the enmity natural to the heart of man, against every thing that is of God, or belongs to the new nature, of which the members of Christ are partakers, and you will see abundant reason, independently of circumstances, why the servants of God should be held in hatred and contempt by the children of this world. At times these feelings have broken out openly, and they have been subjected to violent persecutions, and loss of goods and life; but in all times the world is of the same mind towards them—therefore the world hateth them, because they are not of the world, as He Himself was not of the world. And this has not been concealed from us by Christ; He has not held us out any prospect of ease and luxury. He has told us plainly, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Nay so far from concealing it from them, He makes it, as in the text, a part of their blessedness, that they are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. We have seen in the other blessings, that they belong to persons and qualities not highly esteemed by the world: but this seems the strangest blessing of the whole, that those should be bless-

ed, who are persecuted—who are forsaken of their nearest friends, and made a gazing stock for all men. We are naturally fond of the quiet and comfort of society,—of the smiles of our friends, and their confidence, and all the little advantages of friendly intercourse; we are fond of sharing our worldly advantages with those about us, and being counted as peaceful members of society, and respectable persons; we are jealous of our characters, and wish to keep them without stain among men, and our own advantage we consult, and eagerly pursue our own profit. But here is a man who is cast out from society and comfort,—whose enemies are even those of his own household; who has few, and perhaps those, distant friends—and is left alone in the world: advantages he seems to have none, much less any with whom he can share them; owing to the malice of his adversaries, he is represented as a disturber of peace, and disreputable, his fair character in the eyes of men is blotted by their slanders,—he seems to neglect his own advantage, and seeks but little after that profit which all around him are going after,—he appears like one who has a mark set upon him that men should hate him, and cast him out from their company. One would think his very heart would sink within him, and that he would perish under the accumulated load of slight and injuries. But this is the very person who in the text, is pronounced *blessed*. There must then be some upholding power, some mighty inward comfort which must work against the attacks of the enemies from without. If we examine the nature of the blessing, we shall find that such does indeed exist: theirs is the kingdom of heaven. They are the sons of a king, waiting for their inheritance; nay, it is already theirs, they are counted in the Church, who is the body and spouse of that King,—even of Christ. He came down upon earth to purchase the Church to Himself; He staid with her awhile here below; and He is gone up into

heaven to prepare the heavenly mansions to receive her in. Meanwhile He has left her on earth deprived of His bodily presence, but living on His precious promises, fed with His spiritual flesh and blood, to try her faithfulness to Him. She is espoused, betrothed, given in marriage to Christ, the King of heaven; and in her all His faithful ones, so that already, signed and sealed with a sure promise, the kingdom of heaven is theirs. And He has sent down to His earthly bride this memorable sentence, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne." Earthly power, riches, or kingdoms, belong not to the servants of Christ; yet however poor, however despised they are, they are princes in disguise: even now their royalty shews itself in an exalted and heavenly mind, in affections raised above the earth, in subduing their stubborn wills, and bringing every thought into subjection unto the righteous law within them: and they have their attendants too,—the ministering spirits who are sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation; the angels of the Lord tarry round about them that fear Him, and if our eyes could be opened, and we could see the goodly company of heavenly guards which surround the head of the faithful servant of God,—if we could behold him in his most forsaken moment, when all are turned against him, thronged with bright ministers of joy and defence, we should see that not even Solomon in all his glory was attended like one of these. When men revile them, and taunt them with lifting themselves above their neighbours, and cut them to the heart with bitter reproaches, they can hear the sweet voice of the heavenly Bridegroom saying to His Church, "Behold, thou art all fair My love, there is no spot in thee." When the sons of the earth deprive them of their possessions, they can hear the same voice saying, "Fear not little flock, for it is your

Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." And when they are put under severer trials than these, which are hard for flesh and blood to bear, cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover bonds and imprisonment; when their flesh and their heart fail, He who is the strength of their heart and their portion for ever, is a very present help for them; and His golden words, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life," disarm all their tortures, and fix their eyes on Him who is waiting to receive their souls. Thus great, thus exalted, is the blessing of those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. And there is yet more of it behind. "Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." If a cup of cold water given in Christ's name shall not lose its reward, surely those who suffer for Him, and are made outcasts for His sake, shall have great and worthy reward in His kingdom. It is one of the marks of God's people, to "have respect unto the recompense of the reward;" to be fully assured that works done in Christ and for His name's sake shall not be forgotten; but are all recorded before Him. There is no surer sign of an humble spirit and one subjected to the will of God, than a clear and practical view of the nature of our christian reward for works done in Christ. While some vainly suppose that our own works can effect our salvation; and some on the other hand seem almost to forget that such a thing as the christian reward is mentioned in Scripture; he who loves Christ by faith, fully assured of his union with Christ and salvation in Him, is also fully assured that not the meanest work done in His name shall be unrewarded; for he has the word, the eternal unalterable word of his Saviour for it; and long as the seal on that bond of the Scripture remains,—long as those words remain which though heaven and earth pass away, shall not pass away,—so long shall the work and labour of love of

Christ's justified people not be forgotten, but be surely and gloriously rewarded. To those who are in Christ sin is not imputed : being received into Him their sins are cancelled by His satisfaction ; and therefore all that they do and suffer for, and in Him, is accepted by God the Father, and will be rewarded by Him. " Rejoice and be exceeding glad ; for great is your reward in heaven."

But there is another source of comfort still ; indeed they seem inexhaustible and never ending to those who are united to Christ. " So persecuted they the prophets which were before you." Ye that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, lift up your eyes and look on the stars, and see if you can tell their number and names. Far more in number is the company who are gone before you from affliction like yours, to glory brighter than the brightest of those heavenly bodies. Once, and once only, are we told that any of them descended and were seen by men,—and then, even our Lord Himself put on for a moment the brightness of His glory to meet them ; when He was transfigured on the mount, Moses and Elias, two of those that were persecuted for righteousness' sake, appeared in glory and talked with Him : and the Apostles trembled as they entered into the cloud which surrounded them—so bright and so heavenly was their appearance. But, as we advance in this divine subject, grounds of support and joy seem to thicken upon us, and the seed time of persecution and tears appears, indeed, to lead to a rich harvest of rejoicing ;—" Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you ; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings,—that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." Our profession is, to have been buried with Him by baptism into death ; if therefore, we find ourselves made partakers visibly of His sufferings, we see accomplished in us what every christian

desires—likeness to Him; and the visible sign and participation of His death is openly shown forth in us. “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye—for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified.”

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast in the Lord. If you live united to Christ, you have trials and severe ones too; it is equally true in all times, that those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. Let not the neglect, the scorn, the taunts of men, turn you aside from the steady serving of God and cleaving unto Christ. Be not ashamed of His name in the presence of men: what are their taunts and scorn to you? You are kings; surely it is not for you to tremble at these poor foolish slaves of worldly thoughts—surely it is not for God’s ransomed ones and the heirs of glory, to tremble at the presence of an ignorant scoffer of this world. Look forward but a few years, and where are all their taunts and bitter words, and scornful looks? Whenever you feel tempted to deny or to compromise Christ, look straight to that day when you hope to awake up after His likeness; look to the great day of recognition and account, and as you wish to be acknowledged by Him at that day, so now let your acknowledgment of Him be. And if you fall into persecution, if ungodly companions ridicule you or hinder your faith; for this you are all the more blessed—for you will be, by a visible likeness, shewing forth your Saviour,—you will be by their persecution driven to cling closer to Him, to commune with Him more in prayer, to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Him.

One word more. God knows whether I be now speaking to any who have been, or are, the persecutors of the children of God—who by deed, word, look, or thought, have attempted to hinder the faith and progress in holiness, of a neighbour. If I

be, however weak, however inconsistent that neighbour might be, you have been, as far as in you lay, destroying the sheep of Christ whom He bought with His blood. And, as one of those appointed to watch over His fold, I solemnly tell you in His name, that "it had been better for you never to have been born." "Whosoever offendeth (they are His own words) one of these little ones that believe on Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hung about his neck, and that he were cast into the sea." You may well tremble before that king whom you have so grievously angered. Turn then to the Lord and to His people, with weeping, and mourning, and praying, if perchance, this thought of your heart may be forgiven you. Far better is the state of those you persecute and despise, than your own; with all your scoffs and reproaches they are happier than you—they have no hurt from without, and what is more, they have no worm gnawing within. Here I leave the comparison, for I tremble to think of you, if I look forward any further. May God give you a better mind, even the spirit of true repentance. Oh shame and sorrow, that we should have to turn in a christian Church to address such as these! When will the Lord come and purify His temple, and present us to His Father, an acceptable people, a pure and blessed Church?

Pray, my brethren, for that glorious time, when the number of the elect shall be accomplished, and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake now, shall have entered on the possession of the kingdom!

AMEN : EVEN SO COME, LORD JESUS.







