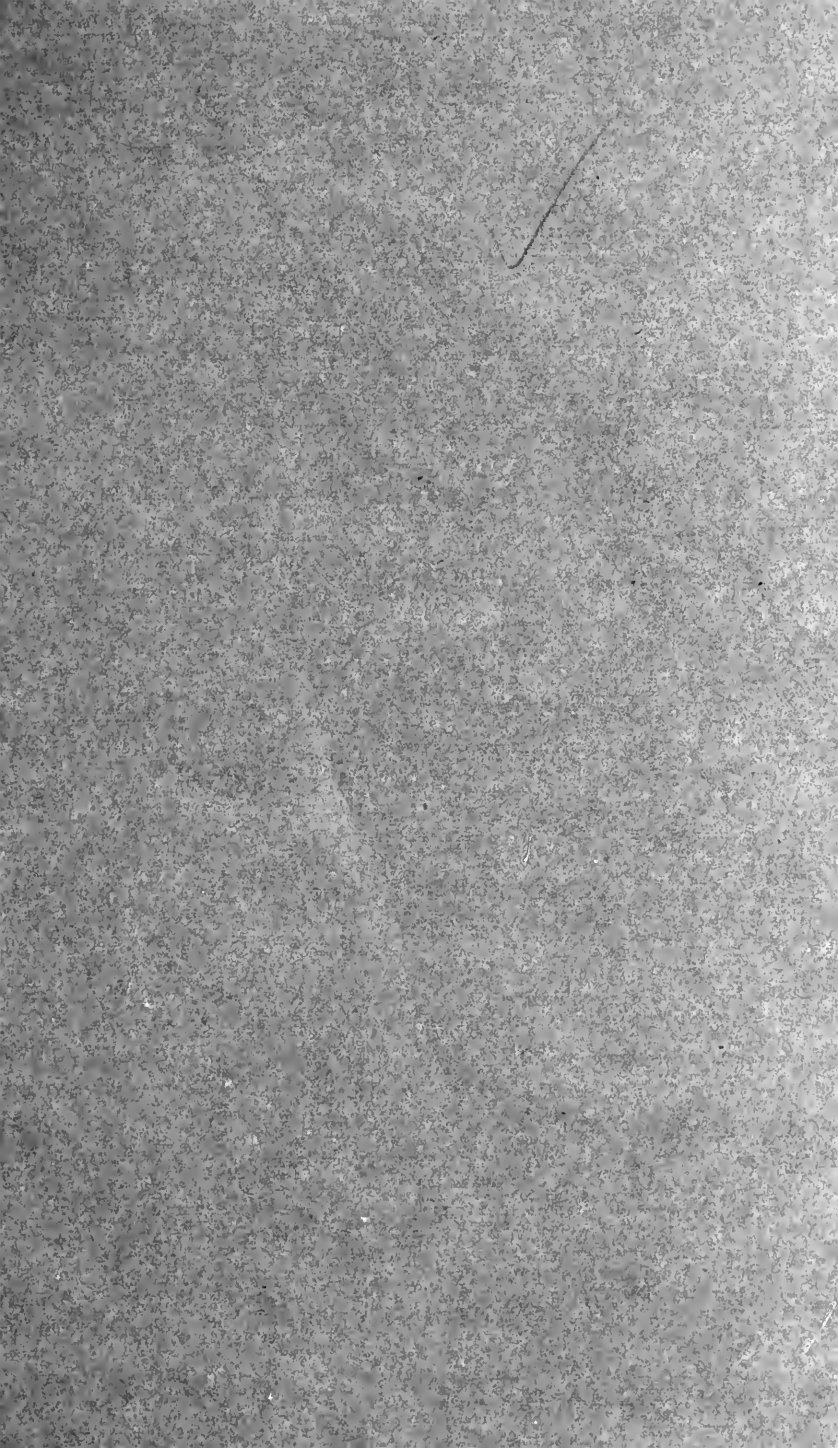




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John G. Talbot

THE RICH AND THE POOR ONE IN CHRIST.

Sept. 1858.

A S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN

S. Peter's Church, Sudbury,

AUGUST 3, 1858;

*Being the Commemoration of the Free Opening and
Restoration of the Church.*

BY THE

REV. JOHN KEBLE, M.A.,

Vicar of Hursley.

“All equal are within the Church's gate.”—G. HERBERT.

LONDON:

J. T. HAYES, LYALL PLACE, EATON SQUARE:

SUDBURY: J. M. KING.

1858.



A SERMON.

Proverbs xxii. 2.

“The rich and the poor meet together: the LORD is the Maker of them all.”

HE who wrote this sentence was the richest as well as the wisest of men. For Holy Scripture expressly says, “King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.”* And it was great part of his wisdom, no doubt, to consider how he should make the most of his riches, for God’s glory and the good of His people; and in order to do this, how he should order his own mind and heart concerning them. And we are told that God “gave him” not only “wisdom and understanding, exceeding much,” but also “largeness of heart, even as the sand which is on the sea shore.”

Largeness of heart—what is that? We may partly judge by what is said to the Church; how it should be with her when the great Gospel promise should be fulfilled: “Thou shalt see, and flow together, and *thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged.*”†

To all His other precious gifts the HOLY SPIRIT would add this crowning one, a heart to understand and value in some measure the greatness and depth of them all; and to fear exceedingly, as one entering into a cloud of glory:—a heart to perceive how that

*1 Kings x. 23, 29.

† Isaiah lx. 5.

“ whatsoever God doeth,” and whatsoever He giveth, “ it shall be for ever;”* it has eternal and everlasting bearings; and it spreads far around, far beyond the immediate occasion and the person immediately benefited.

I say, when a wise and understanding man’s mind is opened, not only to receive the truth, but thus to feel the length and breadth and depth and height of it—not for himself only, but for all for whom God intended it—then that person’s heart is “enlarged” in the sense in which Solomon’s was, and in which God intended His Church’s, and the hearts of all Christians to be. Those are the true “enlarged views,” my brethren, which look around on all men, and onward beyond all time; they are the very contrary to whatever is selfish and narrow-minded: and by them the HOLY SPIRIT instructed that wise and rich king, and the Church of which he was the type, to think of the rich and poor always as in relation one to the other: not as separate, not as in contrast, but as parts of one great and harmonious whole, in due time to be revealed in its fulness by Him Who ordained it, and Who alone understands it.

“The rich and the poor meet together:” they are (so to speak) correlatives in this great system of God ALMIGHTY’S ordering; as parents and children are, and subjects and rulers, and servants and masters, and young and old: one cannot be without the other. Their mutual interests, and rights, and duties, fill up a large space indeed in this our world of trial: they are entwined and mingled in a thousand ways: they meet each other at every turn.

This is God’s ordinance, and His Scriptures and His Church are perpetually reminding us of it; yet

* Ecclesiastes iii. 14.

to one looking superficially on the outside of human life, especially as we see it under the high pressure (so to speak) of modern civilization, it might appear more to the purpose, if one talked of the separation and divergence, than of the intermixture of the several classes. "The rich and the poor" (it might seem natural to say) "keep far apart, yet the LORD is the Father of them all" At any rate, such is to a great extent the feeling of those who are outwardly lower in the scale: you may hear, and you may still oftener overhear from them, sayings, which show how very painfully alive they are to the distinction; how hard it is even for the best among them thoroughly to reconcile themselves to it; and how sadly, alas! for the greater part of them, the whole of life is embittered and made fretful by an impatient sense of their inferiority. Both for them and for their (so-called) betters, no teaching could be more wholesome than that, which by GOD'S mercy may help them to enter into the meaning of the Bible and the Church, in treating the rich and the poor as One in CHRIST.

Who does not see, for instance, how good and gracious the order of Providence is, towards the richer sort especially, when it brings them into near neighbourhood, perhaps even into close contact, with the most miserable, abject, forsaken of their brethren, from whom, may be, all their lives long, they have been carefully kept, or have kept themselves, aloof? Think steadily for a moment of some one particular case: think upon that instance which He Who knew what is best for us especially chose out, for you, and for me, and for us all, to bear in mind: think upon the Rich Man, and Lazarus at his gate. Here is one who, it should seem, had never known in his whole life any clothing but purple and fine linen; any meal but of sumptuous fare; and things are so ordered, that one is brought

close to him, and laid at his very gate, so that he cannot go in and out without seeing him—one in the lowest state of destitution, a beggar, full of sores, no one to tend him but the dogs, nothing to rely on for food but “the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table.” Here, indeed, were the rich and the poor meeting together, and the Lord, the Maker of both, watching to see what would come of it; whether that “poor rich man” would avail himself of the golden blessed opportunity, and begin to lay up treasure in heaven; whether the beggar would prove rich in patience, in a forgiving and heavenly mind. We know the result—the Watcher has Himself told us;—and we may judge what will ensue by and by, in the thousands and millions of similar instances, more and more abounding among us, as the rich and the poor, in old and thickly-peopled countries like this in which our lot is cast, are pressed into more immediate contact with one another, while their social conditions are forced wider and wider apart. Is it not an awful thought, brethren, as you pass through London, or any large city, that this parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is being invisibly acted over in street after street, at door after door; and souls continually passing away to Abraham’s bosom, or to the place of torment, according as they are found to have considered, or neglected the poor—to have envied, or prayed for, the rich? Surely they both, both poor and rich, have great need one of another; which most, it is hard to say. For if Lazarus cannot live without the leavings and fragments, at least,—“the crumbs which fall from the rich man’s table;”—much less can the rich man prosper without such as Lazarus to wait upon and relieve. He must have such to pray for him, and show him the way to better things, else he will have small chance indeed of escaping the sentence of those

who choose their portion here. “Ye have the poor with you always; and whensoever ye will, ye may do them good:” so we have been told by Him Who is the truth. Only let the lesson be once learned, by any dispensation of God’s providence, severe or gentle, that the poor, even when they seem most separated, are in God’s account always *with* a man—within his reach—for his trial: let this, I say, be only once learned, and it cannot well be ever forgotten, so many, so various are the occasions on which the Voice of God keeps on repeating it to us. I will try to enumerate some of them.

We hear of children born, be it in a palace or in a cottage; we go on a little further, and we hear the bell going for some one who has died. The like thought comes with both. In their births, men are on a level; and death, when it comes, just brings them to a level again. The confession of Job is the confession of all: “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither.” In this sense, undoubtedly, rich and poor, as they set out together from the womb, so they meet together in the grave, the womb of their mother earth. This is not a matter of Faith but of Sight. But Faith, enlightened by Holy Scripture, discovers what eye hath not seen nor can see, as concerning the time before men’s birth and after their death. Faith instructs us to go on to say, “Well may all be born alike and all die alike, visibly, since the invisible origin of all is one and the same; and so, in one sense, is their invisible end also.”

God Himself is their first beginning. Rich and poor alike, He is the Maker of them all, and knoweth all, and hateth nothing that He hath made. As to our bodies, we are all of the First Adam, whom God created out of the dust of the earth. And of all, rich and poor alike, we read, “Thine eyes did see my

substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O GOD! how great is the sum of them!"* To the beggar Lazarus, as well as to the richest and greatest, the promise is distinctly made, and stands sure: "The very hairs of your head are all numbered;" and "Fear not," for "not a sparrow shall fall to the ground without your FATHER;" and "Ye are of more value than many sparrows."†

If He thus take account of all our bodies, much more of all our souls. For they also have their beginning, one and all, from Him: and that more immediately than our bodies have. For the body was formed out of the clay; but the soul, the breath of life, was breathed into man's nostrils, by the very LORD Himself and Giver of Life.

And accordingly it is men's souls that He claims for His own, His special property, in that remarkable verse, "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the Father, so also the soul of the Son is mine; the soul that sinneth, it shall die."‡ The poor man's soul is His as well as the rich man's; both are alike set down in His Book; and as both are of the same origin, the Breath of His Mouth, so in the end both return to Him. It is His own word, uttered, as in our text, by the voice of the wisest of men: "The dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto GOD Who gave it:"|| the spirit of man "going upwards,"§ because it came from Him Who dwells on high.

Thus, in the end of this our earthly being, the rich

* P s. cxxxix. 16, 17. † S. Luke xii. 7; S. Matt. x. 29, 31.

‡ Ezekiel xviii 4. || Eccles. xii. 7. § Ibid. iii. 21.

and the poor meet together, as the Church in the Burial Service acknowledges concerning all, good and bad alike: "It hath pleased ALMIGHTY GOD to take them unto Himself."

Even if we knew no more than this, it might well chasten and subdue our pride and envy, and make us gentle and considerate one towards another; but blessed be GOD, we know a great deal more than this: we know that the ALMIGHTY and All-Holy One, from Whom in a certain sense we all come, and to whom, one and all, we are to go,—we know that He not only knows and cares for our wants and feelings, whatever be our station in life, but that He has actual *sympathy* with us. How do we know this? We know it by that, which is the great mystery, the corner-stone of all our faith; namely, that except in what is sinful, He has been ever since His Incarnation in very deed one of us, is now, and will be so for ever. In Him "the rich and the poor meet together" in a way unspeakable and unthought of by man. For as His Apostle tells us, "Ye know the grace of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." "He was rich," indeed, the Lord and Owner of all things, for He "created all things, and for His pleasure they are and were created." But He emptied Himself of this glory, made as if it was not His, "made Himself of no reputation, took on Him the form of a slave, was found in fashion as a man." And while according to the immensity of His Divine Nature He fills heaven and earth, He vouchsafed at His birth to be laid in a manger for a cradle, and during a great part of His earthly life not to know where to lay His Head; yet knowing Himself all the

while to be absolute Lord and Owner of all things. So that in a wonderful way He could sympathize, yes, literally sympathize and have entire fellow-feeling with the opposite extremes, as need arose.

Our LORD's history when He was among us,—His whole life here in the flesh,—is full of tokens to this effect;—instances in which the wealthy and the poor were wonderfully brought together around Him, and in relation to Him. What, for instance, and whom should we have seen, had we been waiting with Mary and Joseph beside His manger-cradle? First, the very poor, the shepherds of Bethlehem, whose calling was to watch over their flocks by night,—to watch in their own persons, as unable to hire others; and then, perhaps within a few days, wise men from the East, such as Solomon was in his time, rich, knowing, noble, supposed to be royal persons. Here, at the very beginning of His earthly life, are the rich and the poor marvellously met together, in honour of their LORD, become Incarnate for them all. They met, where heaven and earth had just met, in the stable, by the manger, at Bethlehem.

And though in His unutterable love towards the poor He chose to be Himself poor in this world, poor with a very deep poverty; though by preference He lived among them, sought them out, preached His Gospel especially to them; yet are His Four Gospels studded, as it were, with precious tokens that cannot be overlooked, of His perfect sympathy with the rich also. Who has not observed the very striking and significant way in which He from time to time brings Himself, the poor and needy One, into closest communion and contact with those who had enough and to spare? What a meeting of rich and poor was that, when He, a supposed carpenter's son from Nazareth, appeared in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, the

teachers of chief renown and highest rank of their time ! and again, more privately, when He talked to Nicodemus by night, and to him first, as it would seem, revealed the secrets of regeneration and atonement ! to Nicodemus, a rich man, a ruler of the Jews. Each one of the miracles wrought for centurions, noblemen, rulers of the synagogue, and the like ; each one of the miracles taken from the ways and dealings of householders, judges, merchants, sometimes even kings ; each one of the many occasions on which He condescended to eat and drink with publicans, or entered for that purpose into rulers' and Pharisees' houses :— each and all of these would appear to be cases in point ; cases in which His Gospel, primarily preached to the poor, overflowed as it were to the salvation of the rich.

What a look of unspeakable, yearning sympathy was that, which He turned on the rich young man who had asked Him what He must do to be saved ! Of none other do we read, "JESUS, beholding him, loved him." But mark which way His love tended : "Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven : and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."* As the greatest favor He could show that young man, the greatest encouragement to his beginnings, what does CHRIST command him ? "Thou art rich : become poor like me." He would make riches and poverty meet as it were in those who should come running to Him to be saved, as they had met in His own self : as though He should say to each one of us, what a holy man of our own Church once said,

"Give all men something : to a good poor man,
Till thou change names, and be where he began." †

* S. Mark x. 21.

† G. Herbert.

It is true, that favoured young man did not for the time accept the gracious word. "He went away sorrowful, because he had great possessions." But who can say that his heart did not turn afterwards? that he was not one among those whom the HOLY GHOST at His first coming moved to lay all at the Apostles' feet?

Then, there are the rich penitents, S. Matthew, Zaccheus, and Mary Magdalen; so many types of those, who being outwardly in circumstances which would give least promise of conversion, have at sundry times come uncalled to their SAVIOUR, or have answered at once to His call: blessed results of His revealing Himself in His low estate to the wealthy and refined.

Observe, too, His intercourse with the chief Priests and their council, with Herod, and with Pilate, on the last day of His earthly life; was He not the "poor wise man,"* showing those great ones the way to deliverance, had they but been willing to be delivered?

And as might be expected after all this, His Cross and His Grave became especially gathering-places for rich and poor alike. There were to be seen, of the one class, His Blessed Mother and her kinsfolk, Mary, especially, the wife of Cleopas, our SAVIOUR's aunt, and Salome with her younger son, John the Evangelist. These were there as samples of CHRIST's poor; and of the rich, who were "to eat and worship," were Nicodemus, Joseph, and S. Mary Magdalene. The poor dying thief who had forfeited all, and the centurion, Cæsar's officer, who presided at His execution, were one in this—that they were both attracted to Him by His Cross. He was "lifted up," and rich and poor and "all men" began at once to be "drawn unto Him."

* Eccles. ix. 15.

CHRIST being thus rich and poor at once, the richest and the poorest on earth; and His sympathies when on earth, having been felt by both classes alike; in Him, and as members of Him, rich and poor Christians meet and are made one, even now in this present life, after a fashion which no heart of man could have imagined. Perhaps the Apostle's words may point to this, when he mentions it as part of the description of himself and the other ministers and members of CHRIST, that they are as persons "having nothing, and yet possessing all things;" having nothing of their own, but possessing all things in CHRIST. This was the case, even outwardly and visibly, among the first and best Christians.

What a gathering of rich and poor was that at Pentecost, when "all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need,"* when the poor widow with her two mites, and the rich who cast in much, appeared as it were anew, manifold in number, to offer at a better treasury, and to receive a more perfect blessing.

Thus, as CHRIST Himself, from the moment of His Incarnation, was mysteriously both rich and poor; so in His Church and kingdom, from the moment of the descent of the HOLY GHOST, there has existed on earth a marvellous and entire union of those two classes, otherwise so far asunder:—the true Socialism, the true Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity:—a union more or less obscure, but always real, and always realized in proportion to the faith and love of those who professed to receive it. In the Holy Catholic Church "the rich and the poor" are indeed "met together," in the Name of that LORD, Whom they

* Acts ii. 44, 45.

know to be not only "the Maker," but also the Redeemer and Regenerator "of them all."

Do you ask a token of this? cast your eyes around you. Look, for instance, towards the Church door, how it stands open at all times to all comers, and mark the Font which stands near it: how are matters ordered at that Font, when young children are brought there, to be admitted by baptism into the Church and Fold of CHRIST? Does any one ask about their parents, whether they are rich or poor? No! the only question is, "Hath the child been already baptized, or no?" The only difference which the Church recognizes between one infant and another, is, the one being in the sinful condition which by nature it had of Adam; the other baptized and born again in CHRIST. Once know that the child is unbaptized, and you know and are sure that that child has a share in the loving invitation, "Every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."* Be it a king's child or a beggar's, the same prayers are said for it; the same SAVIOUR, by one or other of His Ministers, takes it up in His arms, the same words are spoken over it, the same water applied to it, the same SPIRIT comes to make it partaker of the same CHRIST; it is baptized into the same Holy Trinity, the same Cross is made on its forehead. And afterwards, when the child, being baptized, is carried home out of Church, it matters not whether he is carried to a hovel or a palace; just the same things are to be taught him, whatever his line of life is to be: one and the same prayer to be said, one and the same Creed to be believed, the same Ten

* Is. lv. 1.

Commandments to be learned and practised by all. GOD'S Word, whether at home or in Church, is to you what it is to me. There is not one Bible for the rich and another for the poor: how should there be, since there is but one Heaven for both, and one way to it, and the Bible teaches that way? And we are certain there can be but One Communion, because JESUS CHRIST is One and One only, and the Communion is the partaking His Body and Blood. And His Own prayer on consecrating that first Holy Communion, the night before His Passion, was, that we all might be one with Him and with each other, as truly as He and the FATHER are one. What a mere nothing in comparison of all these great unities is the diversity between the rich and the poor, that is, between those who for a short time have some more some less of that "which" moth and rust doth corrupt, "and thieves break through and steal!" And how ashamed shall we one day be of ourselves—how despised and humbled in our own eyes, when by the light of eternity we shall look back upon our own vain imaginations, and remember how our poor foolish hearts allowed themselves to depend on that, which was so very soon to make itself wings and fly away!—to depend on it, if we had it, to repine and despond, if we wanted it.

As Englishmen, we believe, and we have a sort of pride in believing, that we are all equal before the eye of the law: let us have so much faith in the great Lawgiver of the whole world, as to believe Him when He tells us, that as "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female," so neither is there rich nor poor, "but we are all one in CHRIST JESUS." As you advance in this faith, my brethren, you will grow more and more large-hearted; you will be like people ascending in a region of high mountains—inequalities which from

below seemed insurmountable will appear spread out as a plain at your feet.

Great reason have we to be thankful that it is not in the Church of England as in some other parts of Christendom, where, although the space in God's House is left free and open to all ranks, learned and unlearned, the Services are not so, being shut up in a strange language; and what is worse, the very forgiveness of sin, as there taught and understood, is more open to the rich than to the poor. I mean, so far as it may depend on the Church's special intercession in the Sacrifice and Sacrament of Holy Communion, or, as they usually call it, the Mass. For, as is very well known, such intercession in many cases is not to be had without being paid for, and of course, so far, is only for those who can afford it. But our Litanies and sacramental intercessions are freely offered for all who ask them.

This privilege is common to all English Churches. I wish I could say the same of what I am next going to specify—the free use of the Church itself. Would to God, my brethren, that from every pulpit in the land that might be said which one may say here, “Look around, and see with your own eyes a congregation ordered on terms of true Christian equality:” an outward thing indeed, and so far a small thing in comparison, yet a true and precious token of CHRIST'S merciful purpose, that in Him the rich and the poor should meet together.

For it is not here as in too many English Churches, that either for money payments, or by supposed right of ownership, or by evil custom imagined to be law, or insisted on in defiance of law, the holy ground is parcelled out, and regarded and kept as if it were private property, to the great loss both of rich and poor; many being in fact shut out of God's House, and the

precious faith and feeling of Christian brotherhood sadly diminished and dimmed among those who are still found there. Here, my brethren, it is not so : here, by God's good providence, you see a Church truly, really, entirely free ; taking away in this parish all the several excuses that are made all the country over, of not knowing where to sit, not being sure but one's place may be taken, or whether one may not have sat down in some other person's place. You see a Church open as the day, free as the air, for all Christians who desire it to come in and honour their SAVIOUR and hear His Word. All the glories and beauties of the building, the ornaments, the furniture, the Services, and all things that are done here, belong to one as much as to another. In one Service, to be sure, that is, in the Offertory, the poor might seem to have the advantage ; if we remember what He to Whom we offer said as concerning the Poor Widow. But it rests with those who have enough and to spare to obtain her blessing, if they have the heart to do as she did. Will you not think of her to-day ? and will not the thought make a difference in your offerings ? For surely He is looking down to see how we cast our gifts into this treasury. I grieve to say that in one respect the call on you is stronger than might have been wished ; since the regular offerings here, I understand, fall far short of the sum required for the work. Here then is a good opportunity for the richer sort to do something towards equalizing their privileges with those of their poorest brethren, by giving "to their power, yea, and beyond their power,"* for the maintenance of this rare testimony to the perfect freedom of the Church and the Gospel.

Saving then this one advantage, which in all

* 2 Cor. vii. 3.

Christian Churches the poor cannot but have over the rich, there is here, my brethren, absolutely no difference among you, but what you make yourselves by the minds and tempers and habits you bring with you into Church ; by your behaviour here, and your life and conversation every where.

No difference but that one : but then, my brethren, consider well what and how great a difference that one is. Consider that all which God's good providence allows to be done, here or in any other place, in the way of making His Gospel free to all, is so much added both to your responsibility and ours. We, the Clergy, are so much the more inexcusable if we do not, in heart and endeavour at least, do our very best to convert and perfect you : and have not you also the more to answer for, if you go on refusing to be converted and perfected ?

Some of you may recollect the story of a great heathen king, when from his throne on a high place he looked round upon the hundreds of thousands who followed him ; how he burst into tears at the thought that in so many years' time not one of them would be alive. But that thought was nothing, nothing at all, to compare with what a Christian might well feel on looking around him in such a Church as this ; a Christian Minister especially, looking down on such a congregation. "Alas !" (such an one may well say in his heart,) "who shall live when God's justice shall separate those whom His mercy hath thus brought together ? When the poor heathen who lived and died in the slavery of their original sin shall put to shame thousands of us, who had free Churches to go to, open Bibles, Sacraments unpaid for, Pastors with whom to advise in sickness and in health : and where are the fruits of it all ?

The very plenteousness of the means of grace is to

some, we know, a sort of temptation, an occasion and excuse for spiritual sloth. They seem to have their LORD always within their reach, and so they are bold to trifle with Him, and put Him off to a more convenient season: as we not seldom find that persons, who have lived all their lives long close to some wonderful sight, some object of universal interest, have never gone to see it themselves, upon this very ground, that they might do so whenever they pleased.

May the ALMIGHTY GOD preserve us all from such profane negligence in regard of the inward and spiritual glories of His Gospel, that "great sight" which He reserves for pure consciences and obedient hearts; through the grace, mercy, and loving kindness of our LORD JESUS CHRIST: to Whom with the FATHER and the HOLY GHOST, Three Persons, One God, be honour and glory, worship and thanksgiving, love and obedience, now and for evermore. Amen.

