

The Sacred *Feast*

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George Lester ***

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The sacred feast

THE SACRED FEAST

SHORT DISCOURSES ON THE LORD'S SUPPER

BY GEORGE LESTER

AUTHOR OF "GRIMSBY METHODISM," "THE WESLEYS IN LINCOLN-
SHIRE," "LORD TENNYSON AND THE BIBLE," ETC.

"It ought to be matter of solicitude on the part of Christian ministers to teach their people the right doctrine of the Sacraments, especially that which lays emphasis upon their relation to the New Covenant, its benefits and obligations."—DR. W. B. POPE

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TO THE REVERED MEMORY OF

BISHOP SIMPSON,

WHOSE DISTINGUISHED PIETY, SANCTIFIED ELOQUENCE, AND
MASTERLY GIFTS OF ADMINISTRATION WERE RECOGNIZED
ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC,

I DEDICATE

THIS LITTLE VOLUME, AS REFLECTING—IN HOWEVER IMPER-
FECT A MANNER—THE SENTIMENTS OF THAT GIFTED
AND HONORED EXPONENT OF METHODIST
DOCTRINE AND PRIVILEGE IN
REGARD TO
THE SACRED FEAST.

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I.

On the Duty of Church Fellowship.

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”—John xvii, 20, 21.

THE short discourses on the Lord’s Supper, which form the chief part of this little volume, may be appropriately introduced by an address on THE DUTY OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.

The words of our Lord now to be considered occur in a quite unique portion of the Gospel narrative. We are told more than once that the Lord Jesus prayed. Occasionally some few words that he uttered in prayer are recorded in the New Testament; such as, “Father, glorify thy name;” “If it

be possible, let this cup pass from me," etc.; "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." Other petitions, too, are recorded as having been spoken by the Saviour of mankind—particularly in connection with his suffering and death.

But there is nothing quite like this. Here we have the substance of a long act of devotion preserved. It has been designated "the prayer of the high priest, now about to take upon him his office, and to offer atonement for the sins of the people." It consists of (1) the prayer for himself (verses 1-5); the prayer for his disciples (6-19); the prayer for the whole Church (20-26).

It was a night of sore anguish that was before him. All the agony of Gethsemane, the sorrow of the betrayal, of that mocking and scourging, of Peter's denial, of the way to Golgotha, and of the bitter cross—it was all consciously present to his mind. "He knew all things that were coming upon him."

But there was something more that he knew. He had already spoken of the mission of his apostles, and of the coming and office of the Holy Spirit. Even now, in this prayer, he anticipates the victory of his Gospel, the faith of multitudes, the establishment of his spiritual kingdom. It is observable how, by anticipation, he regards the future body of believers as being already in existence. The guarantee and earnest of the Church that is to be is here in this company of apostles who are kneeling around him as he pours out his soul to God. Opposition there will be; by some they will be despised and rejected, as he had been. He has already forewarned and forearmed them. And yet he sees that all along down through the ages some will "believe." That Church of which he had spoken to Peter (Matt. xvi, 18) will be built; "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

For these believing souls he prays; he prays "that they may be one:" "one" in a

unity that shall be like the unity of the Father with himself. And what kind of unity is that? It is a unity of disposition and purpose; but it is more than that. It is a vital unity, in which "the members share the life of one and of the same organism" (Rom. xii, 4, 5). It is a unity which shall produce a moral miracle—a conquest of the resisting will of man: the world will "believe that thou hast sent me" (verse 21). All this points to *the visibility, continuity, and permanence of Christ's Church on earth.*

The early Christians had an external, as well as a spiritual, bond of union. Such as were being saved were "added to the Church." "The Church" was not a miscellaneous assembly of worshipers without organic association, conditions of membership, or internal order. It was an organized community, with its duly appointed officers and its accredited membership; with its means and ministers of grace, and its brotherhood of mutual help and oversight.

All this did not come about in a casual, accidental way. Nor was it a mere pious and prudent arrangement contrived by the apostles. It was distinctly of Christ's will and appointment. He prescribed no exclusive form of church organization and government; but he made it clear—beyond possibility of mistake—that it was his purpose and his prayer that his disciples should be united, not only to himself, but to each other in a bond of fellowship, witness, and service.

This is the answer to the question as to church fellowship when it is asked, Does it matter? The reply is, It does matter to your loyalty to Christ.

It is impossible for any who purpose to live the Christ life to formulate any valid excuse for remaining outside the pale of Christ's Church.

Excuses there are in plenty; they are always poor, sometimes they are paltry. They are pleaded in ignorance of the solemn duty

of an avowed profession of faith, or in a self-assertiveness which is unbecoming in face of divine requirement expressly set forth.

“I am not good enough;” “I fear that I may disgrace my Christian profession;” “I see so many inconsistent professors;” “I am doing my best though not a member;” “I can’t afford it;” “I do not approve of this or that form of membership”—these are some of the excuses pleaded. There is not one of them that has not been answered scores of times, or that could not be answered again. It is not proposed to deal with any of them now; but, with them all in mind, and conceiving that a hundred more of such may be pleaded, over against them all is placed the explicit purpose of our blessed Saviour.

This is a subject that has been often discussed from too low a level. Our text raises the point of observation. It puts this question outside the region of mere “likes and

dislikes ;” it urges it upon the solemn duty of fidelity to Christ.

No apology is offered for our own particular form of membership, for the simple reason that it does not need an apology. As to the class meeting, it has had plenty of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, as well as of open attack. It is capable of abuse—as is every other form and condition of membership. Are there no troubles accompanying other tests of membership? Is confirmation never abused? Are the tests of Presbyterianism and Congregationalism in every case satisfactory in their application to individuals? I trow not. If these Church arrangements were of direct authority from Christ himself, it would yet be possible to abuse them. The very grace of God may be “turned into lasciviousness.” The fact is, *all these forms and conditions of membership are human*, and bear the weakness—or sagacity, as may be—of everything that is human. We claim no higher authority for

our form of membership than is claimed for that of other communions. But we accept no lower view of it than what belongs to any other. Judged by the scripturalness of its philosophy, the practicability of its application, the ease with which it accommodates itself to climatic and economical circumstances, and the story of its success, the Methodist form of church membership stands second to none of all the organizations which aim at brotherly recognition and Christian fellowship. No doubt the efficiency of a class meeting depends a good deal upon the leader, but not so much as is often imagined. Our classes are pretty much what the members make them.

But, whatever section of "Christ's Church militant here upon earth" may seem to you to approach most nearly to the primitive ideal, to capture your enthusiasm, to furnish the largest and freest possibilities of fellowship and of service, it is at once your duty and your privilege to attach yourself

to that community of Christian believers. And, being so attached to it as part of the Church universal, it is your further duty and privilege—as a Christian—to partake of the holy communion. The partaking of the Lord's Supper does not *constitute* church membership; rather, it is the token of it, while it is a declaration of Christian discipleship.

“The Lord's Supper” is a sacrament in the true sense of the word, wherein the believer and the Saviour renew their pledge either to other. The communicants, in like manner, pledge each other. It is a renewal of “the bond of the covenant.”

In no other of the means and ministries of grace, as known to Christian believers, is there, or can there be, so large and joyous a consciousness of fellowship with “*all* them who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” The holy Supper is no sectarian badge, but—notwithstanding all the divergent views entertained as to its nature and

efficacy, and all varieties of form and order for its administration—is the universal token of discipleship. “One is your Master even Christ, and all ye are brethren.” “Outward union is *an effect*, not a cause; it springs from and depends upon inward unity in Christ. The spirit which enables a man to join in the communion, so far as Christ’s relation to him and his relation to Christ is concerned, is the one secret for producing true communion with all who hold like precious faith in him who is our common Head and Lord.”

“How happy are we
Who in Jesus agree
To expect his return from above!
We sit under our Vine,
And delightfully join
In the praise of his excellent love.”

II.

**On the Office of the Holy Spirit in the
Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.**

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."—
John xiv, 26.

NO careful reader of the New Testament can fail to notice how intimately our Lord's fullest teaching concerning the Comforter is associated with the institution of the holy Supper. His valedictory address was, probably, spoken and his intercessory prayer offered in the very room in which, after supper, he took the bread and the cup and gave them to his disciples, saying, "Do this in remembrance of me." Or, if not actually in that same upper room, there was no sort of interval between the

institution of the Lord's Supper and the last great discourse.

Now this is very significant. We can hardly realize the surprise and speechless awe of the disciples as they received from their Master's hands the bread and the cup with the command that enjoined upon them and upon his followers through all time the perpetual memorial of his broken body and shed blood. Again and again, in the course of their association with him, his words and actions had been such as to occasion their astonishment. During this same night they had cause for amazement as he rose "from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded." So entirely beyond their comprehension was this object-lesson on humility that Peter may well have exclaimed, "Thou shalt never wash my feet."

But this giving of the bread and the cup, as the symbols of his body so soon to be broken and his blood so soon to be shed, surpassed all that had ever occurred in the course of his instruction. It is not recorded that any of them asked a question, or remarked in any way whatsoever upon the Master's solemn procedure. It was no time for questions. And yet, mysterious as it all was, could they not leave it to him to make all plain to them, as he had so often done before when they were perplexed?

Nor have they long to wait for what shall explain all. Not indeed that he will "talk much with" them; but this he will do: he will give them full instruction and guidance by the offices of another. "These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

That promise embraces full instruction as to every part of the blessed Saviour's work, but (is it too much to say?) it has especial reference to the elucidation of this commemorative ordinance. This, then, is the theme: **THE OFFICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.**

It is in our Lord's teaching concerning the Holy Spirit that we are to find our instruction concerning this holy communion. As he comes to our assistance, and only as he thus comes, do we know what we are doing at the Lord's table. It is by God the Holy Ghost, and only by him, that we realize the significance and enjoy the blessing of the sacred feast:

“ We cannot think a gracious thought,
We cannot feel a good desire,
Till thou, who call'dst a world from naught,
The power into our hearts inspire;
And then we in thy Spirit groan,
And then we give thee back thine own.”

It is only necessary to call to mind the

nature of this ordinance to see that without the Holy Spirit we can neither approach the table aright nor enter as we ought into this sacred observance. But it is remarkable, neither in the New Testament, where the Lord's Supper is referred to, nor in the office for its administration as contained in the ritual of our Church, is there anything like prominence given to the specific work of the Holy Spirit in connection with this sacrament. In the baptismal office his presence and gracious operation are repeatedly invoked. Again and again we are there reminded that it is his renewing grace which is signified and symbolized in the sprinkling of water. The inward and spiritual grace of which this sacred rite is the outward and visible sign is distinctly his gift—his alone; the ceremony is nothing without him.

And yet, in the communion service there is no specific mention of what he must needs be doing for us from beginning to end of holy communion—save that, indeed, we pray in the

the opening of the service that "the thoughts of our hearts" may be cleansed by his inspiration, and in the doxologies we ascribe praise to him equally with the Father and the Son.

Nevertheless, without the Holy Spirit in the ordinance all is vain and spiritually profitless. The minister can impart no grace; the order and form of service may be solemn and decorous, but in and of itself it is all for naught; the sacramental elements contain no mystic virtue. We are absolutely dependent upon the presence and blessing of God the Holy Ghost. If this holy Supper were a mass—which it is not; if sacramental grace could be imparted mechanically by the ministrant—which it cannot; if the bread and wine became in some mysterious way the real body and blood of Christ—which they are not; or if even the body and blood of Christ were spiritually present in the consecrated elements—which we do not believe to be so; that is to say, if we accepted either the Roman or the high Anglican view of the

Lord's Supper—which we do not—then it might be possible to think of the spiritual good of the ordinance as less dependent upon the presence and gracious ministry of the blessed Spirit. These theories, however, one and all, we distinctly repudiate; for Protestants of the Protestants are we. It follows, therefore, that our evangelical interpretation of the sacrament must include a most distinct reliance upon the Holy Spirit and his blessed work in the soul of the communicant, or we are “of all men most to be pitied” in our doctrinal views and in our observance of this sacred rite.

What then are we to conclude? Are we to suppose that the comparative absence of all direct allusions to the Holy Spirit, both in the accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper and in the form of service we adopt for the administration of the blessed rite, leaves us in doubt as to whether he will be with us to help our infirmities and cheer us in this sacred repast? Certainly not.

It is not simply because we feel to need him so much that we cherish the hope that he will not fail us. We look for his presence and assistance here and now because our needs are just such as it is promised he shall supply; our acts are precisely such as we have been assured he will graciously assist; our yearnings are of the very kind concerning which he is set forth as our most real and satisfying portion. All we know of him as the Paraclete, all those offices of gracious enlightenment, of succor, of comfort, and of sanctity which do most signally characterize "his temporal mission" are such as may be, and will be, exercised as we obey our Lord's express command—as we show forth his death.

"Sinners, lift up your hearts,
The promise to receive;
Jesus himself imparts,—
He comes in man to live:
The Holy Ghost to man is given;
Rejoice in God sent down from heaven."

The very absence of specific teaching leaves us free to apply the whole of our Lord's instruction concerning the Holy Spirit to this most precious and most important expression of our faith in Jesus the Son of God.

Before communion he is with every sincere believer, and so also *in* communion and *after* communion. We are not to approach this table thoughtlessly, but are to examine ourselves. And he it is who will enable us to search our hearts. He will enlighten our minds so that the truth as it is in Jesus may be intelligently apprehended. He will quicken our sluggish hearts that we may be prompt and responsive when spiritual truth is presented to us. He will apply the cleansing blood and witness to our conscience of its part therein. We must throw wide open the door of our souls and admit the heavenly illumination. We must not expect to find in ourselves and of ourselves moral fitness—that there can never be. “We do not pre-

sume to come to this thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies." Not the saintliest among us can approach this ordinance to bestow anything upon God. But the blessed Spirit will show us both our need and God's great mercy. He will disclose every hindrance to profitable communion, and will both incite and help us to put it away. He will cause us to "truly and earnestly repent of our sins," and to be "in love and charity with our neighbors," and will work in us the godly intention to "lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking henceforth in his holy ways." And, thus assisted by him and prepared by him, you will "draw near with faith and take this holy sacrament to your comfort." "The preparation of the heart in man is from the Lord," the Spirit. Fasting cannot prepare you, penance cannot prepare you, the best of rules of godly conduct cannot prepare you; here, as elsewhere, it is the

Spirit who "helpeth our infirmities." If we let him have free course within our hearts he will cleanse us; but "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his." It is in vain that we show our society tickets, or our communion tokens, unless we seek preparation by the Holy Spirit. The preparatory rite of confirmation cannot of itself fit anyone to approach these sacred memorials of his dying love. It is as powerless to cleanse and purify the heart as is the white dress or the spotless muslin veil of the "first communion."

But God's Spirit will create in us a clean heart; he will renew within us a right spirit, for has he not promised: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put

my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."

And *in* the act of communion he will be with you. Indeed, if he be not with you it is all in vain that you eat the bread and drink of the cup. He it is who will make this a true memorial of Christ's death. That to which you are called in the words, "Do this in remembrance of me," is no mere formal act. You may commemorate some event in that way, for example, the landing of Columbus by a "World's Fair," the queen's birthday or accession by a display of bunting and the burst of music, etc. But this holy Supper is no mere ceremony. Drape and decorate the "altar" (so-called) according to the most approved rules of church ornamentation, provide the most elaborate of "altar" vessels, add to all this all that music and vestments and incense and candles can furnish, but what does it all amount to? A spectacle, and in and of it-

self only a spectacle. Can a spectacle be a memorial such as this Supper was designed to be? I trow not. It is not thus that we show forth our Lord's death. But we look for something more knowing that there is One who has access to the inmost chambers of the soul. One who has never ceased to draw and strive and lead upward our wayward, wandering hearts. God *in* us as well as God *over* us and God *for* us, the Holy Spirit himself.

“ Come, thou everlasting Spirit,
 Bring to every thankful mind
 All the Saviour's dying merit,
 All his sufferings for mankind :
 True Recorder of his passion,
 Now the living faith impart ;
 Now reveal his great salvation
 Unto every faithful heart.

“ Come, thou Witness of his dying ;
 Come, Remembrancer divine ;
 Let us feel thy power applying
 Christ to every soul, and mine :
 Let us groan thy inward groaning ;
 Look on him we pierced, and grieve ;
 All receive the grace atoning,
 All the sprinkled blood receive.”

III.

On the Lord's Supper as a Covenanting Act.

"This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."—Luke xxii. 20.

IN this blessed ordinance we are called upon to make or to renew our solemn pledge to Christ as "the Captain of our salvation." Not that this is all that is intended by this sacrament; but everything else in our use of the Lord's Supper should lead up to this. Our penitence and humiliation on account of sins and shortcomings, our lively apprehension of God's covenant of mercy as set forth in the atonement we call to mind, the avowal of our faith, the very expression of eucharistic joy—all should issue in the fresh and unreserved surrender of ourselves to the Lord. In fact, if this be not done, one of the most important parts of this sacred function has

been neglected. It is our privilege to go from the table better Christians than we were when we came to it. We do not come hither to bestow anything upon God, but to receive from him. And, out of his gifts to us, we are to render to the Giver a solemn, joyful pledge to be henceforth his loyal loving servants and soldiers. It is to assist to this, that attention is now directed to THE LORD'S SUPPER AS A COVENANTING ACT.

The word *sacrament* is not found in the English New Testament, nor was it in use among Christians in the first century—at any rate, as applied to the Lord's Supper. What the precise idea which those who first used it had in their minds it is not necessary now to inquire. It is commonly agreed (among Protestants at least) that it stands for *mystery*, that is, a spiritual thing symbolized, or for an *oath*—especially an oath of allegiance. Indeed, both these may be intended, since one is in no way opposed to the other. It is in the latter sense that the

word is chiefly used ; it is in that sense it is used in this discourse. It suggests just that important view of the Lord's Supper upon which it is proposed to dwell, namely, sacred obligation. The words " memorial," " communion," " eucharist," and all such terms require this further thought of *pledge* to make them complete as descriptions of the nature and intention of the Lord's Supper. Our partaking of these simple elements—bread and wine—is to be the token and pledge of our relation to Christ Jesus as our Lord and Leader. He is to be henceforth, not only Saviour, but Master.

This is no new idea ; it is a view of the ordinance that is as old as the holy Supper itself. When the Lord Jesus said, " Do this in remembrance of me," it was not simply that he wished them to keep him in mind : his sufferings, his fellowship, his love. All that certainly ; but not all that exclusively. His life was to be their example ; his teaching the pattern of theirs ; his death their ransom,

and therefore the inspiration of their devotion. They were to live and labor in the spirit of loyalty to his sovereign love. St. Paul, who received by special revelation his knowledge of the institution of the holy Supper, has given us an important word: "The love of Christ constraineth us"—as a river is constrained by its banks, so Christ's love displayed to us and imparted to us prevents us from doing anything but serve you for Christ's sake. Look at that life of splendid devotion, ponder its intensity, its fervor, its heroism; what is it? It is the sacramental life—the life of loyal enthusiastic devotion: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

This idea of pledging ourselves to God in Christ in the act of communion is plainly enough set forth in the Invitation which forms part of our ritual: "Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the com-

mandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to your comfort." So again in the concluding prayer: "And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee."

It is not less conspicuous in the hymns we sing in our communion service. Those hymns constitute a concise and precious body of divinity, in which the historical, doctrinal, and practical aspects of the holy communion are set forth. And in them this particular aspect of the ordinance is duly brought to remembrance. Who can forget such stanzas as these, for example:

"To this sure covenant of thy word
I set my worthless name;
I seal the engagement to my Lord,
And make my humble claim."

And this:

"The badge and token this,
 The sure confirming seal,
 That he is ours, and we are his,
 The servants of his will ;
 His dear peculiar ones,
 The purchase of his blood,
 The blood which once for all atones,
 And brings us now to God."

In such terms our fathers—full of the eucharistic joy—pledged themselves to Christ. Can we improve upon the sentiment or set before ourselves a loftier ideal of Christian devotion?

But what does all this mean? Of course, it means that in our communion there is to be something more than a commemoration, more than a sacred repast, more than a mystic fellowship; there is to be a holy pledge of devotion to our Redeemer-King.

Here, in this memorial of his dying love, we are to admit his claim upon all we are, and all we have. Whatever of joy, of comfort, of strength, this blessed ordinance shall impart, it shall all lead us to a fuller conse-

cration and to a larger service. We are not only to take all that he offers; we are to give all that he asks.

And the more express and solemn we make our pledge of devotion the better. The military salute is not simply a token of respect to a superior officer; it is the recognition of a pledge to serve the country's cause.

To what are we to pledge ourselves? To the mind of Christ, to the will of Christ, to the service of Christ. There are a thousand things concerning which the New Testament gives no specific instructions. The decision with regard to them must be left to the enlightened judgment and conscience of the individual Christian. It has pleased our Saviour to elevate and sanctify the relation of his loved ones: "I call you not servants; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." He trusts them; and as to the service, it is the service of friendship.

And where the whole heart has come under the domination of his love there is little to fear as to conduct. Only, observe, all this is not the lowering of the standard of life, but the elevation of it. If Christ has complete possession, the question will never arise as to how near to the world we may venture to go, how far we may allow ourselves in doubtful things, how little we may do for him and yet presume to call ourselves Christians. It is the very opposite of all that which will be our rule of life. The pledge we give to him, and to his people for his sake, is the sacred promise of a devout and loving mind which accepts his service as "perfect freedom." His "yoke is easy" and his "burden light," not because it does not cross our corrupt natural affections, but because it appeals to our renewed heart as being "holy, just, and good." Just as it is our highest honor to bear his name, so it becomes to be our greatest joy to do his will. What that may involve we cannot

know; but this we may know, that his will must always be our highest ultimate good, and that to do it is our truest satisfaction.

You say, "O, but it is all too much for me, I cannot rise to that—poor, feeble disciple of his as I am." Of course you cannot. But it is just here that he meets you in the greatness of his mercy. The one question is, Are you willing? If you are willing, he will make you able. This very sacrament is the seal which he has put upon his covenant of grace, and thus it becomes to those who approach it aright a "means of grace." The rite that lays these vows upon us exemplifies the grace and strength in which alone we can fulfill them. It teaches us that it is by abiding in Christ, by receiving him as the food and life of our souls, that we can keep his commandments and bring forth fruit to God. Under no other conditions do we so fully recognize our own weakness as at the table of the Lord, and nowhere else can we so truly and trustfully

say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." He pledges himself to me a poor sinner; I pledge myself to him to do his will—in humble dependence upon his grace and strength. Are you willing? Then be sure he is faithful who hath called you.

There will probably rise up before many of us recollections of past unfaithfulness, broken purposes, neglected opportunities, quenched affections, waywardness, worldliness, and God only knows what besides. All this will humble us, and perhaps make us fearful and distrustful. But even this must not discourage us overmuch. "We have an Advocate with the Father." He prays for us; he will help us.

Let us then renew our youth at the sacramental fountain of joy and strength, and we shall go forth with a new power over sin, with a quickened vigilance. Our souls—wholly devoted to Christ—will enjoy a richer fellowship with him, and be made ready for larger service.

“ But human weakness searches, Lord, in vain,
To find aught like thy pity, or thy pain.
How shall my works, tho’ toiling day and night,
Thy love requite ?

“ In truth my sacrifice is nothing worth,
Yet thou in mercy will not cast it forth ;
Thou’lt put me not to shame, but for love’s sake
My offering take.”

Is there a something that keeps some of us back from full-hearted avowal of our devotion to our Redeemer? Is that so? Then let each of us bring this thing to the light—to the light of this memorial of his dying love. Then look at it. What is it? A craving for some worldly indulgence, some forbidden pleasure, some fascinating but inconsistent course of conduct or habit of mind? Is it that we lack the spirit of forgiveness and charity? Bring it, bring it all, face to face with these symbols of his sacrifice. What did he not give up? What did he not suffer for us? If the call to absolute and unconditional surrender can be made

upon us anywhere, surely it can be made here. And if the power to respond to that call can be made operative at one place rather than another, it is the place of the sacred feast; and in the strength of this spiritual food we will go many days.

“ The saved and Saviour now agree,
In closest fellowship combin'd ;
We grieve, and die, and live with thee,
To thy great Father's will resigned ;
And God doth all thy members own,
One with thyself, forever one.”

IV.

On Eucharistic Joy.

“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.”—Matt. xxvi, 30.

THE communion of believing souls at the table of the Lord ought to be an occasion of holy joy.

The original institution of the holy Supper was associated with great solemnity and deep sorrow, but it had nevertheless its “cup of blessing” and its hymn of praise. To the disciples there was the sad prospect of losing their beloved Master; they had witnessed the growth of Jewish opposition and had heard his words foretelling his betrayal, sufferings, and death. To our blessed Redeemer it was a night of unparalleled sorrow that lay before him. Unutterable anguish was to fall upon his sinless heart. The be-

trayal by one of his own, the agony in the garden, the heartless mob with their swords and staves, it all lay before him. So, too, did the arrest, the trials before the high priest and Herod Antipas and Pontius Pilate ; the derision, the cruelty, and the scorn ; for "he knew all things that were coming upon him." Yes, he knew already the solitude, the mockings, and the bitter cross which awaited him.

All along through his life among men he foreknew the terrible cost which the fulfillment of his mission involved. However difficult it may be to us to grasp the idea of our Saviour as a "foreknowing sufferer," to him the pains of life and the more awful pangs of death came as no surprise. By a merciful law of God's providence our future is positively concealed. Both as to the joys that are to cheer us and the sorrows that are to oppress us we say, all quite truly enough, "I know not what awaits me." But "He knew all things;" the homeless-

ness, poverty, and spiritual loneliness, the opposition, contempt, and malice. He knew it all before it was actually experienced. He knew it all, even as now it stood between him as "the joy that was set before him."

And yet, for all this, before the table was left at which he had sat with his disciples there was a duty to be performed, a privilege that must not be neglected—there was the hymn to be sung before "they went out into the mount of Olives."

What? a hymn; sing a hymn? Yes; for this was an appointed exercise in the yearly observance of the passover. And—what is more—the solemn joy of "the hymn" was in no sense inconsistent with the deep sorrow of the passing night.

As he knew all things that were coming upon him, so also he knew what lay beyond the cross and passion. He knew that Death could not keep his prey; that beyond the humiliation and the suffering, and the ap-

parent failure, there lay the certain triumph and the mediatorial reward. He knew "the joy that was set before him." Had he not, again and again, referred to it as he taught his disciples? Do we not detect the anticipation of it when he likens his crucifixion to the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness, his burial to Jonah's three days and three nights spent in the sea monster? In fact, when "the sufferings of Christ" are brought into prominence, so also is "the glory that should follow." He had "many things to say unto" his disciples which as yet they could "not bear;" but this much at least he would teach them: "And ye now therefore have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

It is almost beyond question that "the hymn" sung by our Lord and his disciples was the second part of the *Hallel*. The first part had been already sung in an earlier stage of the paschal meal. We turn to

Psalms cxv, cxvi, cxvii, and cxviii to find this immortal composition. As we study it, we feel more than its appropriateness as a pass-over hymn; we realize its peculiar fitness to the occasion when the Saviour of mankind was going forth to the "baptism" where-with he must needs "be baptized." These psalms magnify God as the giver of good; they express confidence in his never-failing mercy; they avow a faith which, under the most grievous conditions of man's lot, shall be neither timid nor silent.

They were sung on this occasion in the regular course of the passover celebration; but what words selected from any part of the rich treasury of Hebrew song could have been so signally appropriate to circumstances of our Lord and his followers on that night of distress? We imagine how the soul of the willing sufferer would be refreshed and strengthened, and how his distressed disciples would gather comfort as in slow, solemn strains they sang these words:

The LORD is my strength and song, and is become my salvation.

The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly.

The right hand of the LORD is exalted: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly.

I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD.

The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.

Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the LORD:

This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter.

I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.

The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.

This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.

Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD.

God is the LORD, which hath showed us light : bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.

Thou art my God, and I will praise thee : thou art my God, I will exalt thee. (Psalm cxviii, 14-28.)

This, then, was "the hymn."

As the singing of a hymn was not inappropriate at the institution of the Supper, so neither is it unseemly—but on the other hand it is most fitting—that in our observance of this sacramental ordinance we should find a place for the recognition and expression of our solemn joy. This holy Supper is a memorial ; it is a communion, a commemoration ; and with all and in all it is *the eucharist*—the thanksgiving.

The holy joy which it should both inspire and express is suggested more than once in the form of words which we employ in the communion service. There is the language of confession, of humiliation and self-abasement, and of penitent supplication, it is true ; but there is also the language of

adoration and praise. Thus, the challenge: "It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto thee, O Lord, holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God." Then comes the "seraphical hymn" (*trisagion*): "Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious name, evermore praising thee, and saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Glory be to thee, O Lord most high. Amen."

Now all this is *in keeping with the nature of this "sacred feast."* The Lord's Supper was instituted in close connection with the passover celebration—a season of rejoicing, kept in remembrance of God's deliverance of his people. To bear in mind the close connection between the passover meal and the Christian ordinance will assist us to understand the nature of the meaning of the holy Supper. The connection discredits

the vagaries of present-day sacerdotalists, who make much of "non-communicating attendance" and "fasting communion," and denounce "evening communion."

In the primitive church the eucharist followed the love feast, and the abuses which St. Paul deplors in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. xi, 17-22) are those of "divisions" and possible excesses. Certainly, the apostle does not disallow what is simply social and gladsome.

We "do this" in remembrance of him, and thus we "show the Lord's death;" but in no sense is there a repetition of the great oblation. A sacrifice there, indeed, is; but it is the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving—all that, and only that. We know nothing of "the host," nor of the altar of sacrifice; what we know is "bread" and a "communion table;" and the terms we use, in common with evangelicals at large, are such as, of set purpose, repudiate the dogmas of transubstantiation of the real pres-

ence of Christ in, or along with, the elements, and of "the unbloody sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ."

The sacrificial idea is one which did not attach to the eucharist in early Christian days; it is an idea which finds no support from Scripture; it is an assumption which is distinctly disallowed by the authoritative formularies of both Episcopalian and Presbyterian—as witness the Articles of the Prayer Book and the Westminster Confession.

More than this need not be said; but less than this could hardly have been said when the object is to impress the fact that the Lord's Supper is a memorial of the life and death of Christ, and not a sacrifice of propitiation. The Gospel minister is not a priest—dispensing the holy symbols to the people; but one who approaches these emblems just as others approach them, one who receives and enjoys this spiritual feast having equal needs and equal blessing with every Christian disciple.

It has already become necessary, and in the near future it may be imperative, for those who stand by the New Testament and by the great divines of the Reformation to speak out and to repudiate what is pronounced to be a "blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit."

Let us meditate upon the sorrows of our Lord that we may adore the love that provided our ransom; let us gaze upon his cross that we may feel the heinousness of sin; let us approach his table with a becoming sense of our unworthiness lest we think lightly of God's great mercy. Our true place is "in the dust," but if we know him and love him, let us "draw near with faith." "The table of the Lord," as Watson has said, "is not to be surrounded by superstitious terrors."

"In wonder lost, with trembling joy
We take the pardon of our God;
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye,
A pardon bought with Jesus' blood:
Who is a pardoning God like thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?"

These simple memorials of his broken body and shed blood—bread, unchanged; wine, unchanged—must not be regarded as awful mysteries, in the presence of which God's pardoned and accepted child is to stand as if he faced some angry ogre, some sullen oracle. No simpler elements could have been ordained as reminders of our adorable Master. "He took bread"—the bread that was before him on the supper table; "likewise after the supper he took the cup"—that same cup of which they had drunk during the meal. The bread and wine are in themselves suggestive, but the value of the sacrament is not in the elements, nor in the acts of him who administers. The value of the ordinance is in the exercise of appropriating faith on the part of the believing communicant. The very symbolism of the Supper is dead, unless he who eats the bread and drinks of the cup has in his own soul the faith-faculty which is signified by "eating" and "drinking;" that is, personal ap-

appropriation. Hence the continual prayer for faith and for the Holy Spirit.

Is the question asked, "Why is the holy Supper an occasion of solemn joy?" Then we answer: It is a Gospel ordinance. It does not pertain to a dispensation which "made nothing perfect;" it belongs to "the better hope," with its unchangeable priesthood, its one and all-sufficient sacrifice, its spiritual dispensation with "life and immortality brought to light." There attaches to this Gospel ordinance nothing of gloom or legal fear, or of superstitious bondage. The great watchwords of grace may be written over this table: "No condemnation;" "Justified by faith;" "Eternal life."

We do this in remembrance of "Christ Jesus; pre-eminently" in remembrance of his death; but not that exclusively. The ordinance is intended to recall his holy incarnation, his sinless life, his glorious resurrection and ascension. What matter is all this for joy and praise!

This blessed ordinance is intended for present and peculiar blessing to the believing communicant. Not that there attaches to this sacrament a monopoly of grace; nor, indeed, that spiritual life and joy are communicated only in connection with church ordinances. But if we approach the holy Supper aright we may look for a spiritual blessing which no other pious exercise can give, and for the common blessings which come of faith with greater fullness of expectation, and surer apprehension of them.

If it were not so, the sacrament is superfluous. Our cup of joy may here be full of former blessings enriched and new blessings bestowed. Thus we say, like her of the Canticles: "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love."

"We need not now go up to heaven
To bring the long-sought Saviour down :

Thou art to all already given,
Thou dost e'en now thy banquet crown ;
To every faithful soul appear,
And show thy real presence here."

As an act of the communion this sacred ordinance promotes a sense of fellowship with the one and only Saviour of mankind, and with his saints both on earth and in heaven. "Of him the whole family in heaven is named." Not even the angels of God can experience the rapture known to a redeemed man.

"Not angel-tongues can e'er express
The unutterable happiness ;
Nor human hearts can e'er conceive
The bliss wherein through Christ they live,
But all your heaven, ye glorious powers,
And all your God, is doubly ours !"

As a covenanting act the Lord's Supper inspires a solemn joy. Here we as Christ's servants and soldiers bind ourselves afresh to him as the Captain of our salvation. While, then, we solemnly pledge ourselves to such a leader we may well rejoice.

Indeed, under whatever aspect this blessed ordinance is viewed, in all it will be found to suggest a divine joy.

But in all this, the measure of our gladness will depend upon the attitude of our own spirits. "Unto you that believe is the preciousness." Another reason for spiritual gladness lies in the prospective reference of the Lord's Supper. We look that our Master shall come again, that the fellowship of the symbolic memorial feast shall one day find its consummation in our Lord's actual presence.

As we approach his table we may sing our hymn, and the spirit of praise will be to us like the water of Bethlehem to David; there is none like it:

"Under his banner thus we sing
The wonders of his love,
And thus anticipate by faith
The heavenly feast above."

Let us sing our hymn of faith and love, not only at his table, but at all times and in

all places. "When sorrow bows the spirit down" there is still a place for the hymn. We need but to take a large view of the dealings of God to feel at least that sorrow ought never to make us either sullen or dumb. We have been exhorted to patience under suffering; let us strive to go beyond a mere uncomplaining submission to the will of God. "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall follow."

V.

On Anticipative Communion.

“ Until that day that I drink it new [with you] in the kingdom of God.”—Mark xiv, 25.

OUR hope as Christ's disciples, that one day we will “ eat and drink at his table in his kingdom,” is not a hope that is “ lively ” merely at the table of the Lord. It began when we were first brought to “ know him and the power of his resurrection.” The recognition and expression of this hope lies in every act of worship, and underlies every deed of service. The Lord's Day is at once the commemoration of his resurrection and the anticipation of our own. Every occasion of holy rapture revives and impresses this hope. There is no monopoly of divine grace.

But to this blessed ordinance there belongs, in a special sense, the spirit of fervent hope

and lively expectation. It helps to fix our thoughts, as no other means of grace can, to an equal extent, upon Christ as "the author and perfecter of our faith."

There can be no doubt at all that our Lord and Saviour has *gone from us into glory*. The ascension, like the death and resurrection of Christ, is fully attested by credible testimony. The record of how he was "taken up" is no more open to question than is any other portion of Gospel history. The effect of Christ's ascension to heaven upon those who witnessed it was that "they returned to Jerusalem with great joy." The vision of Jesus "standing on the right hand of God" filled the first martyr with triumphant joy. The outpouring of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost and his continual operation in the souls of men is the abiding token of our Saviour's glorification. The Church of the Redeemer confesses him as an exalted Saviour, and adores him as such in her hymns of praise. We recall and "show" his death

in this eucharistic celebration ; yet we know that he lives, "to die no more." Yes, he who once lived to suffer now lives to reign.

There can be no doubt that our Saviour *will come again* to receive unto himself all who love him.

"Where is the promise of his coming?" etc., is only the question of the cynical and the scorner (2 Peter iii, 1-14). "Till he come," marks the time limit of the sacramental celebration, and indicates the expectation of his Church on earth. No controversy as to the millennium, or as to the personal reign of Christ upon earth, need be raised just here. His own word, in Matt. xxvi, 29, "that day" looks, distinctly enough, to the consummation.

Now the Lord's Supper is the *token and pledge* of his coming, and of the glorification of his saints. The ordinance is as anticipative as it is commemorative. We "draw near with faith" knowing that Jesus died, and that he will "appear the second time with-

out sin unto salvation." This holy sacrament is the sign of this our faith, its distinct and explicit avowal; and we have not taken in its full significance and its mystic joy until we have realized that it means *that*—over and above all else that it intends.

Observe our Lord's representation of *the festal character of heaven*. He is sitting at the paschal feast when he speaks of drinking with his chosen of the new wine in his Father's kingdom. The joy of fellowship is to be renewed by and by; the feast is the symbol of the glorified life (Luke xxii, 30). And the fellowship is to be not only renewed, but heightened. The new wine of heavenly fellowship is better than the best that earth can ever know. Is any conception of heaven larger or purer than this conception of "eating and drinking at his table in his kingdom?" Golden streets and jasper walls and the pure river, and all else that pictures glory, cannot compare with this revelation of pure and unending fellowship:

“ This is their supreme delight,
And makes a heaven of heaven ;”

Heaven means company ; hell, none !

Every such representation of the joy of the saved suggests such a *contrast*. No feast with Jesus here, means none yonder. Dr. Candlish once preached from the text, “ The Lord will give grace and glory.” These were his “ divisions ”—as suggestive as they are clever: (1) First the grace, then the glory ; (2) If the grace, then the glory ; (3) No grace, no glory ; (4) The more the grace, the more the glory.

Make this feast a *foretaste* of that perfect and eternal feast. We are not invited to a mere formal act, or even to a mere duty ; but to a mystic fellowship. “ The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ ? ” (1 Cor. x, 16.)

Let this sacred fact *encourage us* to the patience of hope and the labor of love. As the master was strengthened for his mission

by the fellowship of the Supper chamber, and the hallel hymn, so may we find strength in the joy of your Lord. If we may not wholly lose our burdens, we may at least lay them down for a while, and make this holy refreshment our viaticum—our provision for the journey of life. It is the meal of our pilgrimage.

“ All the guests have had burdens, but by the
King’s grant,
We left them behind when we came ;
The burden of wealth, and the burden of want,
And even the burden of shame.

“ The burden of life we may find at the gate,
And carry the burden awhile,
Yet smaller it’s grown on the way that is strait,
And lighter to lift at the stile.”

Let us renew our covenant engagement with the Lord. He is worthy of every pledge and protestation of our love. The best of ordinances is only a means of grace. This occasion can only be to us an anticipation of heavenly joy in the degree to which our

affections go out to Christ Jesus. "Where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also." He searches us now, as he searched Peter of old. "Lovest thou me more than these?" Like the son of Jonas we have made large professions of devotion (John xiii, 37); like him we have probably fallen far below our own purpose of constancy and self-surrender. Shall we not, like Peter, restored and forgiven, and no longer self-trustful but strong in enduring love, answer his searching, saying, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee."

-
1. Hosannah in the highest
To our beloved Saviour,
Who left behind
For all mankind
These tokens of his favor :
His bleeding love and mercy,
His all-redeeming passion,
Who here displays
And gives the grace
Which brings us our salvation.

2. Louder than gather'd waters,
Or bursting peals of thunder,
We lift our voice
And speak our joys
And shout our loving wonder.
Shout all our Elder Brethren,
While we record the story
Of him that came
And suffer'd shame
To carry us to glory.

3. Angels in fix'd amazement
Around our altars hover,
With eager gaze
Adore the grace
Of our eternal Lover ;
Himself, and all his fullness,
Who gives to the believer ;
And by this bread
Whoe'er are fed
Shall live with God forever.

CHARLES WESLEY, 1745.

CHOICE EXTRACTS.

The words of Bishop Samuel Wilberforce :

1. *Fasting Communion.* "It is not in a light sense that I say this new doctrine of fasting communion is dangerous. The practice is not advocated because a man comes in a clearer spirit and less disturbed body and mind, able to give himself entirely to prayer and to communion with his God; but on a miserable degraded notion that the consecrated elements will meet with other food in the stomach. It is a detestable materialism. Philosophically it is a contradiction; because, when the celebration is over, you may hurry away to a meal, and the process about which you were so scrupulous immediately follows. The whole notion is simply disgusting."

2. *Non-Communicant Attendance.* "That this custom is creeping into our Church is not an accident; neither is it brought in for the purpose of making children better acquainted with our service. It is, remember, under quite a different impression. It is with the idea that prayer is more acceptable at this time of the sacrifice; that you can get benefit from being within sight of the sacrament when it is being administered. It is the substitution of a semimaterialistic presence for the actual presence of Christ in the soul of the faithful communicant. It is an abomina-

tion, this teaching of noncommunicating attendance as a common habit."

The words of Dr. J. C. Ryle, Lord Bishop of Liverpool, England:

Evening Communion. "It cannot possibly be sinful to follow the example of Christ and his apostles. Every reader of the New Testament must know that the institution of the Lord's Supper took place in the evening. It is certain that no special hour is recommended to us in the Acts or epistles. The Lord's Supper at Troas must have been in the evening. The very name "Supper," which our Church catechism especially uses, seems to point to the evening of a day rather than the morning."

The words of John Wesley (1778):

"In order to prove that it is our duty to communicate constantly, we may observe that the holy communion is to be considered either (1) As a command of God, or (2) As a mercy to man. These two considerations will yield a full answer to all the common objections which have been made against constant communion; indeed, to all that ever were or can be made. In truth, nothing can be objected against it, but upon supposition that, this particular time, either the communion would be no mercy, or I am not commanded to receive it. Nay, should we grant it would be no mercy, that is not enough; for still the other reason would hold: Whether it does you any good or none, you are to obey the command of God."

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