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SERMONS

ON CERTAIN OF

THE LESS PROMINENT

FACTS AND REFERENCES IN SACRED
STORY.

BY

HENRY MELVILL, B. D.,
PRINCIPAL OF THE EAST INDIA COLLEGE,
AND CHAPLAIN TO THE TOWER OF LONDON.

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S E R M O N S

ON CERTAIN OF THE

LESS PROMINENT FACTS AND REFERENCES IN SACRED STORY.

SECOND SERIES.

S E R M O N I.

THE YOUNG MAN IN THE LINEN CLOTH.

"And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: and he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked."—*ST. MARK, xiv. 51, 52.*

St. Mark is the only Evangelist who mentions this occurrence: we cannot, therefore, as we often may, by a comparison of accounts, obtain a fuller narrative of facts, and thereby settle with more precision what particular truths may have been illustrated or enforced. But if we have only this single account, it goes sufficiently into detail to afford much scope for thought and inquiry; the facts would not have been related at all, and much less with such careful accuracy, had they not been facts which it was important for us to know; and they would have been related, we may venture to believe, more than once, had not their single statement sufficed for information and instruction.

That it was a young man, though no clue is given to his name or condition; that he followed Christ, when his professed disciples forsook him and fled; that he was clad in a linen cloth; that his linen cloth was his only garment; that he was seized by the young men who were hurrying Jesus to the high priest; that, being thus seized, he strug-

gled away, but left his garment behind—these facts are all given with evident carefulness of detail, the Evangelist appearing anxious that we should not pass over the occurrence as though it were unimportant, but should pause and consider why it was permitted to happen, or why, at least, it was directed to be recorded.

Whatever is in any way connected with the apprehension, trial, and crucifixion of our blessed Redeemer, ought to possess for us a special interest; an incident which we might have passed over as of no great importance, had it not been associated with such awful transactions, acquires solemnity, and demands attention, when found in that series of events, of which it is hard to say whether it should most move our awe or our gratitude.

We cannot, therefore, content ourselves with a brief or cursory notice of the circumstances related in our text. We rather regard it as intended to be made the subject of patient and prayerful meditation, and as fraught with deep

and mystic significance. The facts, though given, as we have seen, with considerable detail, are abruptly introduced, and as abruptly dismissed. The young man is brought suddenly on the scene: we are not informed whether he was a disciple of Christ; there is no mention of his motive in following Christ at such a moment and in such a dress; so soon as he has escaped from the crowd, not a word is added which might assist us in conjecturing why the Evangelist interrupted the course of his narrative, to insert what seems to have so little to do with the tragic story of our Lord's closing scene.

This very abruptness, this very mysteriousness, should obtain for the facts our serious attention. We ought to be convinced that what is so strangely introduced was designed to arrest our thoughts, and to reward the study of which we might make it the subject. Let us then, without further preface, apply ourselves to the examination of the facts which St. Mark sets before us in the words of our text. As our blessed Redeemer is being hurried from Gethsemane to the palace of the high priest, let us join ourselves to the crowd, and endeavor to ascertain what there was to deserve the being specially noted by the sacred historian, in that Christ was followed by a young man, with a linen cloth cast about his naked body; that this young man was seized on by the rabble; and that "he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked."

Now we will first glance at the more ordinary comment which is put on the facts, though with no purpose of recommending it as in any sense satisfactory, but rather that we may show it to be vague and inadequate. You are to observe the point of time at which the facts now before us occurred. Our Lord had just passed through his fearful agony in the garden, when his sweat had been, as it were, great drops of blood, and thrice had He entreated, that, if it were possible, the cup might pass from Him. On his returning a third time to his disciples, who, notwithstanding the awfulness of the hour, had been overcome with sleep, He was met by Judas, one of the twelve, who had come accompanied by a great multitude with swords and staves to seize Him, and carry Him before the high priest. Gethsemane was

at the foot of the Mount of Olives; when, therefore, Judas and his crew had seized upon Christ, they had to pass through the suburbs of the city, where any tumult in the dead of the night may have been most unusual, in order to reach the high priest's palace. And the common supposition is, that the young man, wakened by the strange disturbance in the street, had thrown a sheet round him, as the first thing which came to hand; that he had then rushed down to inquire the cause of the uproar; and that, hearing of the apprehension of Jesus, whom he must have known by report, or to whom he may have been secretly attached, he determined to follow, whether from curiosity or a better motive, that he might see how the matter would end.

But if this were all, it would really be hard to say for what purpose, or with what view, the facts have been recorded. Admitting that all Scripture has been written for our learning, it might not be easy to understand what particular lessons were conveyed through the mention of a young man who had been roused from his sleep by a noise in the street, who had not waited to dress himself before hurrying to find out what occasioned the tumult, and who was handled somewhat roughly by the crowd with whom he had mixed in so strange an attire. To say nothing of the many improbabilities in the story as thus explained, for surely it was in the highest degree improbable that any one would have descended into the street in the middle of the night, with nothing but a sheet thrown round him; or, at all events, that, if he had come to the door in this dress, he would have thought of following the crowd into the city without waiting to put on some garment;—but passing by these improbabilities, and allowing that we have nothing but the account of a young man who did a strange and foolish thing, what are we the better for the narrative? What light does it throw on the concluding scenes of Christ's life? What information, or what instruction, does it furnish us in any way in keeping with the tremendous occurrences which the Evangelist had taken in hand to narrate?

The commentators, indeed, remark that the treatment which the young man received, shows that the whole transac-

tion was conducted with extreme violence, and therefore serves to make it the more memorable that the Apostles had all been suffered to escape, and the more evident that Christ had secretly and powerfully influenced the minds of the fierce rabble by whom He had been seized. But we do not see that it can fairly be said, on the explanation just given of the occurrence in question, that the crowd treated the young man with any great violence: the best-humored mob might lay hold of a person who joined them in so strange an attire; and his own fear, rather than their fury, may have occasioned his fleeing away, and leaving his garment behind. Had they been set on doing him a mischief, they might easily have prevented his escape. Hence the common explanation of the incidents before us, resolving them into a mere working of curiosity on the part of the young man, and of ill-nature on that of the crowd, can hardly be pronounced other than utterly unsatisfactory. It leaves the facts themselves most improbable, and the reasons for their having been related quite insufficient; so that you must, we think, be ready to acknowledge that there is good ground for our searching for some deeper interpretation, for our concluding that the Evangelist designed to convey some more important intimations than have yet been derived, when he brought so strangely into his story this unknown young man, and as strangely dismissed him—as though a spectre had suddenly risen in the midst of the crowd, and then had as suddenly disappeared.

But now let us examine more attentively what the dress was which this young man wore; we may be thereby enabled to form a more correct opinion as to the occurrences under review. You often meet with the mention of linen in the New Testament; but you are not to think that, whenever the word occurs in English, the same word occurs in the Greek. For example, you read of the rich man in the parable, that he was "clothed in purple and fine linen." You read also, in the Book of Revelation, that it was granted unto the Lamb's wife, "that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." But the linen spoken of in these cases is defined in the original by a totally

different word from that used in our text. Indeed, the word used in our text occurs but seldom in the New Testament, and, what is very remarkable, in every other place in which it occurs, it relates to the garment which it was then customary to wrap round the dead. "When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth;"—in a clean *sindon*, for that is the word,—or, as we should probably have said, in a clean shroud. Thus again, it is said by St. Mark, in regard of Joseph of Arimathea, and the body of our Lord, "he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen." Here the use of the words "fine linen" at one moment, and immediately afterwards of the single word "linen," might lead you to suppose a difference in the original expressions. But there is no difference. "He bought the *sindon*, and took him down, and wrapped him in the *sindon*." St. Luke has the same word in reference to the same circumstance. "He took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone." But we believe there is no other place in which the word occurs in the Greek Testament; so that, excepting the instance of our text, the Evangelists use the word to express only the particular garment in which it was then usual to enfold the bodies of the dead.

Now we do not wish you to conclude from this, that the word was never employed but of the raiment of the dead—for such was not the fact; but that it was employed to denote a particular kind of garment, and would not be used of any covering which a man might throw over him, just because the covering happened to be of linen. If a man, starting from his sleep, had cast a sheet round him, he would not on that account have been said to have been clad in the *sindon*. In fact, the *sindon*—and it probably took its name from the city of Sidon, the Sidonians having invented the art of weaving this kind of clothing—was a cloak, made of linen, which was frequently worn in Jerusalem, and especially in summer. But besides serving as a covering to the body, the *sindon* was turned to a religious account. It was to this cloak that the scrupulous observers of the law were accustomed to fasten those fringes of which you

read in the Book of Numbers. "Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue." With this sindon also it was that the Jews commonly covered their heads when they prayed. Hence, whilst any one might wear the sindon, merely as an ordinary garment, others might wear it by way of religious distinction; that is, they might wear it in such a manner, or with such peculiarity, as to make it indicative of special strictness, of a rigid adherence to the law of God, or the traditions of the elders.

And this latter would appear to have been the case with the young man of whom we read in our text. It is expressly noted by the Evangelist, that this young man had the sindon "cast about his naked body." He had nothing on except the sindon. And this was not usual. The sindon was commonly used for an outer garment—it was worn, that is, over some other. But there were many amongst the Jews who affected great austerity, devotees who attracted attention by extreme self-denial in diet and dress. Josephus describes himself as having spent much of his youth in the austerities enjoined by different sects, and mentions his living for three years in the wilderness with an enthusiast, who would wear no garment but what was made of the leaves or bark of trees, and would eat no food but what grew of its own accord. What then seems more likely, if you throw together the several considerations thus advanced, than that the young man who followed Christ was a devotee, a person that assumed a peculiar sanctity of deportment, and who, therefore, wore only the sindon, whilst others used a double garment, that he might show greater contempt for the body, and more rigorous habits of self-mortification?

There is no reason for supposing him to have been a disciple of Christ; in all probability he was not; but he was one of those Jews who practised great austerities, and whose dress was meant to indicate a claim or pretension to extraordinary holiness of life. Neither is it to be concluded that he had just been roused from his sleep, and had hurried down as one eager to know the cause

of the tumult; it is as likely that he may have been with the crowd from the first; yea, he may have been as inveterate as any of the rest against Christ: for he may have been a hypocrite as well as a devotee; and the pretender to great holiness will be sure to hate the actual possessor.

But, upon this supposition, what are we to say to the conduct of the multitude? why did the mob fall on the young man, and handle him so roughly? We gave, as a great reason for rejecting the ordinary explanation of the narrative, that it threw no light on the series of events which the Evangelist had taken in hand to relate, that it left us with no sufficient account why he interrupted the sad tale of the sufferings of Christ. But we may make a very different statement in regard to the present supposition, which sets before us the young man as a religious devotee, and as known to be such by the garment which he wore. From the manner in which the multitude treated the assumption or appearance of extraordinary holiness, we may learn something of the temper by which they were actuated, and thus be guided to right conclusions in regard to their hatred of Christ.

It was, we believe, a religious hatred, a hatred, we mean, on religious grounds, or on account of religion, which moved the great body of the Jews against the blessed Redeemer. It is easy to speak of the political feeling, of the disappointment experienced when Christ gave them no hope of setting up a temporal kingdom, and advancing them to sovereignty over their haughty oppressors. And no doubt this political feeling had its play; in many there may have been a dogged resolution, that they would rather have no Messiah than one not likely to fulfil their dream of national supremacy. For it would seem, though it be an awful thing to say, that Christ was rejected by many, not in disbelief of his being the Messiah, but in spite of a thorough conviction that He was. The parable of the wicked husbandmen implies as much as this. "When the husbandman saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance." They distinctly knew the son, you observe: they do not act under any mistake, any false

impression, as to his person; and they deliberately proceed to kill him, because he is the son, because he is the heir, and, as such, in the way of their covetous or ambitious designs. But in regard of the great mass of the Jews, it is hardly to be thought that it was the feeling of political disappointment which made them so bitter and malignant against Christ. On mere political grounds our Lord, after all, was such a leader as might have well suited the people. He could heal all their diseases, He could sustain them in the wilderness; He had the mastery over evil spirits; and their natural impulse must have been, not to reject a leader thus endowed, because He showed disinclination to assuming the deportment of a king, but rather to make Him a king in spite of Himself, and then see whether He would not wield his powers in advancing them to greatness.

But the galling thing, the thing most keenly felt by all classes of the Jews, was the holiness of our Lord: He did not suit them as a leader, because He would make no truce with their evil passions, and allow no indulgence to their lusts. Had He made greater allowance for human frailty, had He not so expanded the morality of the law as to make it denounce the adultery of a look, and the murder of a thought, many, both in earlier days and in later, would have given Him their adherence, and have become his disciples. The main cause of irritation and dislike has all along been the same; it is in active play now, and came into play so soon as it was seen that Christ displayed, and demanded, the strictest purity of action, and word, and thought; if Christianity would but be a little more indulgent to men's vices, it would quickly carry their votes.

But if it were a dislike of Christ, as an uncompromising teacher of holiness, which chiefly moved, or actuated the multitude, we may naturally look to find some exhibition of the fact in their conduct; not indeed, any open declaration—for the worst will hardly confess that it is goodness which they hate—but some ebullition of temper, which shall give the same witness, though not equally direct.

And this we have in the narrative of our text. A young man is seen in the

crowd, whose dress lays claim to special strictness and sanctity of life. Then forthwith breaks out the real feeling of the crowd. They seize the occasion of giving vent to that bitter animosity at holiness, which was really, if not confessedly, the producing cause of their persecution of Jesus. They jostle this young man; they lay hold on him; they strip him of the garment which passed as a sign of devotedness to religion; and thus they plainly showed by what spirit they were actuated, or put beyond doubt the motives which chiefly urged them to their murderous design. Thirsting for Christ's blood, because He had reproved vice, and required righteousness, they could not tolerate amongst them even the appearance of superior holiness. The young man presented that appearance, and therefore they turned upon him, as hounds upon their prey, and forced him to escape naked for his life.

And we cannot forbear from pointing out to you how naturally, on this supposition, each part of St. Mark's narrative follows on the other. On being seized by the multitude, "Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out as against a thief, with swords and staves, to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not; but the Scripture must be fulfilled." What effect was this reference to his teaching likely to produce upon the multitude? That teaching had had for its main object the inculcation of righteousness of life, the abandonment of every form and working of iniquity. And on this account, as we now suppose, the teaching had been distasteful, and had excited the animosity of the people. Hence an allusion to the teaching was likely to irritate the mob; and we may believe them to have been all the more furious, when Christ had reminded them of his discourses in the temple. Then follow the words, "And they all forsook him and fled." The disciples, seeing the irritated state of the rabble, were afraid to remain any longer near their master, and betook themselves to flight. Then immediately comes the account in our text, and how naturally it comes, in what close keeping with what had preceded. The multitude, infuriated at being reminded of what Christ had taught them, would

have fallen on the disciples; but the disciples had escaped: on whom then shall the mob wreak its malice and spite? The Evangelist proceeds to tell us—and nothing could more show the feeling, the temper of the crowd; nothing could more distinctly inform us of a fact, of which it is important that we be assured, that the main producing cause of the hatred shown to Christ was the holiness of his life, and the purity of his doctrine—the Evangelist proceeds to tell us that there was a young man following Christ, whose dress indicated pretensions to extraordinary sanctity; and that the multitude seized on this young man, so that he was forced, by their violence, to leave the linen cloth with which he was clad, and to flee away from them naked.

Now this is so far a sufficient explanation of the occurrence before us, that it makes the dress of the young man give a clue to his character, that it accounts for the treatment which he received from the mob, and that it throws light on the reasons which moved the Jews to the rejection of Christ. But, nevertheless, we believe that a yet deeper meaning attaches to the incidents in question; that these incidents were symbolical or figurative: in other words, that they were designed to shadow forth the facts of our Redeemer's final triumph over death.

Let us refer for a moment to the ordinances which have respect to the great day of atonement, that day of especial solemnity under the legal dispensation, when expiation was made for the sins of the people. On that day the prescription of the law was, that the high priest should take two goats, and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. One of these goats he was to kill as a sin-offering, to bring its blood within the vail, and "sprinkle it upon the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat." Upon the head of the other he was to lay both his hands, confessing "over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat;" and the goat, thus burdened with the guiltiness of the congregation, was to be let go into the wilderness, into "a land not inhabited."

There is no debate that these goats,

taken together, constituted a type of the Redeemer. So vast was his office, so wondrous his work, that figures had to be doubled, ere they could furnish any thing like a sufficient representation. In the goat that was slain, we have the Redeemer presenting Himself as a sin offering unto God, shedding the precious blood which was to be carried within the vail, that intercession might be made, throughout all time, for the Church. In the goat that was sent alive into the wilderness, bearing away all the iniquities of the people, we have the Redeemer risen from the grave, and effecting the thorough justification of all who should believe on his name, their sins being so removed, or borne to an uninhabited land, that, though searched for, they may not be found. It is evident that one goat would not have been an adequate type, seeing that the Messiah had to be represented, not only as "delivered for our offences," but as "raised again for our justification." But the two goats furnished a sufficient and accurate figure; the one having been significant of our Lord as offered on the cross, the other as returning from the grave: so that, together, they shadowed out the sacrifice presented, the acceptance of the sacrifice, and its prevalence as a propitiation for the sins of the world.

But now was it not in a measure to be expected, that, when the time came which the great day of atonement had all along prefigured, there would be something to remind men of the double type? something, at least, to assure the devout Jew, who should look sorrowingly upon Christ led away as the goat to the slaughter, that he would yet behold in him the live goat, escaping to a far land, and bearing into forgetfulness the sins of the people? And with what precision was the double type embodied, if you observe that the crowd, with Judas at their head, lay hold not only upon Jesus, but on the young man who followed him, clothed in the sindon, the linen garment that was usually wrapped round the dead! We have shown you, that, except in describing the dress of this young man, the Evangelists nowhere mention the sindon but where they have to speak of the raiment in which Christ was consigned to the grave. This is surely very remarkable:

it is as though to force us to connect in some way the appearance, the mysterious appearance, of the young man so strangely attired, with the burial of Christ; to compel us to assign it a prophetic or typical character, in place of passing it over as an incident from which little can be learned. As Christ is led to trial, and, therefore, virtually, to crucifixion, He is followed by a young man having nothing on his naked body but the vesture in which, after having been crucified, Christ would be laid by Joseph in the tomb. The same parties who have seized Christ, lay hold on this young man, and try to detain him. But though he is but one against a multitude, he escapes from their hands—he escapes; but he escapes naked, leaving the grave-clothes behind him. Is not this Christ, who, when He had put on the grave-clothes, was not to be kept in the grave by all the malice and power of His enemies; but who sprang from the grasp of the tomb, leaving in it the raiment in which He had been bound up for burial?

So then, just as, on the great day of atonement, in looking at the two goats held by the high priest, you looked on an accurate exhibition of the two grand facts, that Christ died for our sins, and that he rose for our justification; so, in now looking upon Jesus led to the slaughter, and at the same moment upon the young man fleeing away naked, you may be said to take in at one glance, the tragedy of the crucifixion, and the triumph of the resurrection. The young man is brought upon the scene clothed as an inhabitant of the grave, that there might be a filling up of the picture which would otherwise have presented nothing but the dark lines of death—a filling it up with the wondrous exhibition of that very person, who was now being hurried to an ignominious end, breaking loose from the hold even of the sepulchre itself, leaving evidence behind, in “the linen clothes laid by themselves,” of his having spoiled death of its sting, and the grave of its victory.

I do not know how, to a mind fraught with the typical instruction of the great day of atonement, there could have been more beautiful or appropriate manifestations of the truth, that Christ would quickly rise, and, in rising, perfect the justification of his Church. I know not

whether there were any who deciphered, and made use of the manifestation. But it is easy to imagine, and instructive to suppose, that some studied the incidents, and drew from them the proposed intelligence. There may have been in the crowd a devout and aged Jew, like Simeon, who had long been diligent in the services of the Temple, searching in those services for notices of the scheme of redemption, for types or figures of the deliverance promised, from the earliest time, to the fallen race of men. And such a Jew would naturally have given his special study to the solemnities of the great day of atonement. These solemnities, more than any other, would have made pass before him, in fearful procession, the dark, yet glorious, things of the Messiah's endurance and achievements. And now he holds with himself an engrossing debate, as to whether The being, who had wrought so many wonders, but is now in the hands of bloodthirsty persecutors, can indeed be the Christ so long, and so ardently expected. There is nothing in his being led to the slaughter, to persuade him that He cannot be the Christ: he remembers the slaying of the goat for a sin-offering, and feels that without shedding of blood can be no remission. But then he also remembers, that side by side with the goat for a sin-offering, used to stand a goat on which death might not pass—the typical exhibition thus cheering the worshipper with the certainty that the sin-offering would suffice, that the victim, substituted in his stead, would re-appear after death, and prevail, in the largest sense, to the removing all his guilt. O for something of the like double representation, if this indeed be the victim appointed of God for the redemption of the world! O for something to correspond to the goat escaping as well as to the goat dying! The wish is granted. Close by the Lord Jesus, clad in raiment which might seem to indicate an inhabitant of the grave, stands a young man, fixing attention by the strangeness of his attire. As the devout Jew gazes on this figure, hardly knowing whether it belong to the living or the dead, he sees him seized by the very parties who are leading away Christ. Ah, the two goats are now in the hands of the sacrificers, but will neither escape! will the typical

representation not find itself verified? It is a moment of intense anxiety. But all doubt should disappear, there should be nothing but conviction that Jesus, though He must die, would rise from the dead, rise as a conqueror, rise as a justifier, when the seeming inhabitant of the tomb bursts from those that would detain him, leaves the linen cloth, and flees away naked.

And thus the incident which has engaged our attention, is made to fill an important place as symbolical, or prophetic, of Christ's triumph over his enemies. It comes in at the very moment when it must have been most needed, when faith was put to its sorest trial, the Redeemer appearing to have fallen finally into the hands of the powers of darkness. It was, as we have seen, most strikingly significant of Christ's return from the grave—significant, moreover, through an exactness of correspondence with the types of the law: so that it addressed itself especially to those, who, conversant with the figures of the Mosaic dispensation, justly looked to find answerable realities in the actions and endurances of the promised Messiah. I look on this spectre-like figure, this scarcely earthly form habited in grave-clothes, as I would upon a prophet, mysteriously raised up to utter a prediction, at the moment when the prediction was most needed, and in the language which would be best understood by the hearers; a prediction of the resurrection of Jesus; a prediction, therefore, whose tenor was most nicely adapted to cheer his dispirited followers, and which, as being woven out of the symbols of the law, could hardly fail to carry with it its interpretation to those whom it addressed.

And on this view of the occurrence, there is something, we think, very memorable, in the order already mentioned, in which the Evangelist has catalogued events. It is immediately after the statement, "and they all forsook him and fled," that St. Mark gives the account of the young man's seizure and escape. Why had the disciples thus abandoned and fled from their Master, except that his apprehension by his enemies, and the apparent certainty of his being put to death, seemed to them destructive of all hope of his working out their deliverance, and proving Himself

the Messiah that was to reign over Israel? They took fright at the first outbreak of violence, so soon as there was any symptom of Christ's yielding to the wicked: whereas if they would but manfully have stood their ground a little while, they might have been strengthened by a revelation from above, and have learned to brave the ignominy of a moment's defeat, in the certainty of an everlasting triumph. For no sooner had they yielded to unbelief and cowardice, and forsaken their Lord, than there happened that significant occurrence on which we have been speaking, and which portrayed so powerfully, in figures corresponding to those of the law, that He who died for their offences would rise for their justification. They just missed, you see, the delivery of a most expressive and intelligible prophecy, the effect of which could hardly fail to have been the reassuring of their minds, and the arming them with confidence and hope for that season of affliction through which they had to pass. Oh, how often with ourselves may there be something of the like missing, as by a moment or a hairbreadth, of a gracious communication which would scatter our doubts, disperse our fears, and fill us with joyful expectation. We are so impatient, so little disposed to "wait upon the Lord," so ready to take to flight the instant an enemy comes in view, that often, very often it may be, we yield to despair, and give up all for lost, exactly when a little perseverance would have put us in possession of such manifestations of God's purpose as could hardly have failed to nerve for conflict, or strengthen for endurance. We forsake Christ, because He is in the hands of his enemies; when, if we would but hold by Him a while longer, God would show us Christ triumphing, leaving nothing but the linen-cloth in the grasp of his enemies, evidence of their utter defeat, and his glorious escape.

Let us take this lesson from the symbolical occurrence which has been under review—a lesson as to perseverance in duty, though in the face of dangers and difficulties. The supplies of God's grace are to be expected in the way of God's commands. The duty of the disciples was to have kept close to Christ: had they done this, God, as we now see, had prepared for them a typical revelation,

most nicely adapted to their confirmation and comfort : whereas, by shrinking from Christ, they lost the disclosure, and were punished by being left in darkness and dismay. In religion, as in war, there is nothing gained by cowardice : he who turns his back upon the enemy, and flees from the field, may indeed seem to have his life as his reward ; but he might perhaps have had both his life and his honor had he stood to his colors ; and, unable ever after to lift up his head, he had better have laid it at once amongst the heaps of the slain.

And in religion, if not in war, there is certainty, that if we persevere, we shall meet succors ; if we retreat, retreat on worse dangers than we seek to avoid.

Persevere then in every duty without regard to the discouragement : the next onward step may bring you into comparative light ; the least backward is sure to land you in thicker darkness. Ah, learn from the disciples : hastily forsaking Christ, they fled to mourn over disappointed hopes, over a leader in whom they could no longer trust, because He was Himself the prey of the wicked, "a very scorn and outcast : " but, had they kept firmly for a few moments longer at his side, they might have been confident, even whilst He hung on the cross, assured of finding his grave deserted, but with the linen cloth in it to prove that He was risen.

SERMON II.

THE FIRE ON THE SHORE.

"As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught."—*ST. JOHN, xxi. 9, 10.*

These words form part of the account of what St. John speaks of as Christ's third manifestation of Himself "to his disciples after that he was risen from the dead." The most careless reader, perhaps, can hardly peruse the words, without feeling that there is something strange and mysterious in what they state. How came this fire of coals on this lonely shore ? Who kindled it ? Who laid out the provision, the fish, and the bread ? If, as we can scarcely doubt, there were something symbolical or significant, in what thus met the disciples' view so soon as they were come to land, what are the truths, what the lessons, that were figuratively conveyed ?

We have a great and difficult subject of discourse before us. We must proceed with caution, we must proceed

with prayer : the inspired historian adds no explanation ; he gives nothing but the facts ; but the facts would not have been written, except for our admonition and instruction : we are, therefore, to study them with all care, but at the same time, in simple dependence on the teaching of the Holy Spirit, through which alone can the dark things of Scripture be made clear, and the intricate plain.

Let us begin with looking attentively at the foregoing parts of the narrative : these may greatly assist to a right understanding of the facts upon which we are specially to comment.

The chapter before us opens with the mention of the assembling of seven of our Lord's disciples on the coast of the Sea of Tiberias. The solemn interview which Christ had promised to grant to

his followers on the mountain in Galilee appears not to have yet taken place; we may suppose that the disciples were waiting for the commission which they were then to receive: in the mean time they were at liberty, and, perhaps, even necessitated by want, to pursue their original occupations. Under these circumstances, St. Peter tells the other disciples of his intention of going a-fishing. They agree to accompany him: the seven embark together, and spend the night in fruitless toil, for they caught nothing. But when the morning came, there stood on the shore, one, at least, whom the disciples did not recognize, though it was none other than the risen Christ Himself. The boat being at no great distance from the shore, Christ could speak to the disciples; and He accordingly inquired of them whether they had any meat? On their answering, No, He directed them to cast the net on the right side of the ship, and assured them they should find.

Though the disciples did not recognize their Master, there must have been something in the air and appearance of the speaker, which commanded their attention, and, perhaps, caused them to suspect who it was; otherwise they would hardly have been prompt to obey a command which, after toiling all night in vain, they might have been disposed to consider as uttered either in ignorance or presumption. They however cast the net without hesitation, and immediately enclosed so great a multitude of fishes, that they were unable to draw it. This miracle—for they could scarcely fail at once to regard as miraculous, so sudden and large a draught of fishes, occurring at the moment when they were about to give up in despair—suggested that the stranger on the shore must be Jesus Himself; the miracle, independently of its wonderfulness, was so similar in its nature and circumstances to that which had preceded the calling of Peter, that the dullest must have entertained a suspicion, if not a conviction, of the presence of the Saviour.

But it was the disciple whom Jesus loved—for affection is quicksighted—who first satisfied himself as to its being the Lord; and on his telling this to Peter, that impetuous, but ardent disciple threw himself into the sea, that he might

hasten to the Master whom he had lately so fiercely denied, but to whom he now longed to give proof of a devotedness increased by the remembrance of his fall, and the graciousness of his forgiveness. The other disciples, acting with less vehemence, but equally desiring to be with their Lord, proceeded towards the land in their ship, dragging with them the net and its ponderous enclosure. And then it was, on their all reaching the shore—perhaps much at the same moment; for Peter, in his impetuosity, may not have outstripped his brethren who took a more ordinary way of approaching their Lord—then it was that they found what is described in the text, the fire of coals, and provision for a repast.

The fire could hardly have been kindled by themselves over-night; they had been absent many hours, and what they had lighted would have been extinguished. They appear, moreover, to have gone a-fishing from being in want of provision; at all events, they would hardly have left fish behind them on the shore; or, if they had, the fish which now stood ready for their meal could not have been that which their own hands had placed on the coals; the supposition is preposterous, that they had lighted the fire before embarking, and laid fish upon it to cook whilst they were absent on the sea.

Besides, there is something peculiar in the way in which St. John mentions the fire and the provision. He is particular in noting that it was "as soon as they were come to land" that the disciples saw this fire of coals. It was the first object which met their eye on landing. There would have been nothing to mention, had this fire been only what they had themselves kindled over-night. And we may believe that the Evangelist is so careful in pointing out that the fire was seen at the instant of reaching the shore, on purpose to make us understand that the disciples did not light it after they landed, and that neither did they stir up the embers of the day before. You might have expected that the disciples would have been so engrossed with looking at their risen Master as to have had no eye for any other object. Neither would they have had, we may venture to believe, unless for something startling and mysterious. But that strange fire, kindled, as they may have

felt, by invisible hands, seems to have drawn off their attention even from Christ: it fixed their gaze as they set foot upon the shore, and, perhaps, like the burning-bush with Moses, helped to persuade them of the actual presence of Divinity.

And now you will observe, that, though there was all the material for a repast—angels, or the Redeemer Himself, having in their absence made ready the fish and the bread—Christ does not forthwith invite them to dine, but first of all—this is a very significant circumstance—directs them to bring of the fish which they had caught. Neither was this direction complied with in haste, a hand being thrust into the net, and some of the rich store transferred to the coals; there appears, on the contrary, to have been great deliberation: the net was drawn to land; the fish were counted, and found to be in number one hundred and fifty and three; and it was not till this had been done, and then, as we may conjecture, some of the newly-caught fish had been dressed, in addition to those already prepared, that our Lord bade his disciples partake of the meal provided for them by his supernatural power.

Such are the main circumstances of the narrative. You cannot fail to be impressed with the sense as of something strange and unearthly. You feel that, like Moses in Horeb, you must put off the shoes from your feet, ere you presume to approach the mysterious fire which seems to have been kindled in a moment; for the disciples saw it not till they had set foot upon the shore, though you might have expected it to have been visible during the night; come then, and let it be with all awe and humility, but nevertheless in the hope of instruction and comfort, that we gather with the disciples round this fire of coals, and endeavor to decipher the symbolical lessons which the whole transaction may have been designed to convey.

Now there are one or two suppositions which will present themselves to a thoughtful mind, and which deserve a passing notice, though they may be evidently incommensurate with the facts of the case. It may readily occur to you as one explanation of the kindled fire, and prepared repast, that Christ had been thinking kindly of his wearied and

hungry disciples; that, knowing how they had spent the night, and how much they would be in need of refreshment, He had graciously employed his power in making ready a meal, where, had they been left to themselves, they would have been utterly destitute. We need not exclude this explanation. We may believe that it was part of the purpose of our gracious and compassionate Lord, to supply the bodily wants of his followers, to provide fire to warm them, and food to satisfy them. But there is too much reason for regarding the miraculous draught of fishes, like every other miracle, as designed to serve for a parable, to allow of our being content with an interpretation of the text which would strip it of all figure, and reduce it into a mere evidence of the tender consideration of Christ for his people.

There is another explanation which may suggest itself, and which makes the whole transaction refer especially to St. Peter. It would certainly seem as if one great object of this manifestation of Christ, had been the publicly restoring to the Apostleship the disciple who had so shamefully denied Him, but whose repentance had been as bitter as his offence had been flagrant. You will remember, that, so soon as the dinner was over, Christ addressed Peter with the question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me, more than these?" And when Peter had replied, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee," Christ said unto him, "Feed my lambs." This was, as it were, the reinvesting Peter with the pastoral office, of which he might justly be thought to have stripped himself, when he basely, and with an oath, declared that he belonged not to Christ. But Peter denied his Master thrice; and thrice did Christ now propose the same question; and, receiving the same answer, thrice did He deliver the same charge of feeding the flock. As if Peter had thrice lost the Apostleship, by thrice denying Christ, Christ thrice restored to him the office, that he himself, and the other Apostles, might have no doubt as to his having been forgiven, and, as it were, reordained. And when our Lord had thus publicly reinvested Peter with the Apostleship, he proceeded to prophesy "by what death he should glorify God;" so that almost the whole of this interview, as far as it is

recorded by the Evangelist, was occupied with matters personal to St. Peter, as though it had been on his account, or for his sake, that Christ showed Himself the third time to his disciples.

But how does the mode, or character of the manifestation agree with the supposition of its having been granted with an especial view to St. Peter, to his public reinvestment with the pastoral office? Most accurately; for when Simon Peter was first called by Christ, called that is,—for there had been previous intercourse,—to forsake his worldly occupation, and devote himself to the preaching of the Gospel, Christ wrought, as you will remember, a miracle precisely similar, in its nature and circumstances, to that recorded in the narrative which we have under review. Simon Peter, and his partners, were then in a ship on the sea of Gennesareth. They had then toiled all night, and taken no fish. At the bidding of Christ, they then also let down the net; and the result then also was, that immediately “they enclosed a great multitude of fishes.” And then it was that, Simon Peter being overcome by the miracle, Christ separated him for the office, to which he afterwards gave a more solemn appointment, saying, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.”

So that there could not well be a more accurate correspondence than between the mode in which Christ prepared for Peter's first ordination, and that in which he made way for the re-ordaining him after his calamitous fall. It can hardly be imagined but that the similarity of the miracle must have painfully forced itself on the attention of St. Peter, bringing back to the mind of the penitent disciple the happy occasion on which he had forsaken all that he might follow our Lord, and perhaps suggesting how deplorably he had since altered his position, through overweening confidence in his own steadfastness and courage.

But whilst there was thus what we might call a repetition of the whole matter of Peter's ordination, what had “the fire of coals” to do with the transaction? It is this of which we chiefly seek the purport or design; and it does not appear how it served, or contributed, to the supposed object of this third manifestation of Christ.

But we consider that Christ caused a miraculous draught of fishes, to remind Peter how He had called him originally, and to produce in him a sorrowing remembrance of his grievous apostasy. Christ will not solemnly reinvest Peter with the pastoral office, till He has made him again and deeply feel his heinous offence. And the miracle of the draught of fishes will have caused Peter much compunction and bitterness of soul—reminding him of what Christ had done for him, it must have reminded him also, and that too like the piercings of a sword, of his ingratitude and cowardice. But the sad facts of his denial of his Lord require to be yet more vividly brought back to his mind, that he may, through the painful recollections, be yet better fitted for reinstatement in his office. And might not “the fire of coals” help in a measure to recal the painful act of apostasy? Thus much is certain, that the expression, “a fire of coals,” occurs only in one other place in the New Testament, as though this were not the ordinary sort of fire, and the Evangelist wished especially to mark of what it was made. And it is the same Evangelist, St. John, who uses the word on the two occasions; St. John, whose great object in writing his Gospel appears to have been to supply the omissions of the preceding historians. But what is the other occasion on which St. John mentions “a fire of coals?” It is when he is relating what took place in the palace of the high priest, after Jesus had been apprehended, and brought before Caiaphas. “And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals (for it was cold); and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.”

It was, then, whilst he stood by this “fire of coals,” that Peter denied his blessed Lord and Master. It was whilst he stood by this fire of coals that Christ threw on him that look which painting never caught, and which, following on the crowing of the cock, caused him to go forth and weep bitterly. Was not, then, “a fire of coals,” found mysteriously kindled by unknown hands on the shores of the lake, likely to recall to Peter the circumstances of his apostasy? It were hard to believe, that, painfully affected as he must al-

ready have been by the miracle of the fishes, he could have looked on that strange fire, produced to all appearance by another miracle of Christ, and not have had all the scene in the high priest's palace brought back upon him with a sort of crushing power. Again is he standing as he stood on that fatal night, and again he meets the look, which, more terrible in its meek reproachfulness than the fiercest glance of indignation and vengeance, convicted him of apostasy, and convulsed him with remorse. So that the "fire of coals," so pointedly mentioned by the Evangelist, who alone of the sacred historians, had recorded of what the fire was made in the high priest's hall, helps to complete the series of symbolical facts, if you suppose the manifestation of Christ, on the occasion before us, to have been granted with a view specially to the reordination of St. Peter. On this supposition, you are to consider that our blessed Redeemer, graciously designing, by a triple commission which should correspond to the triple denial, to restore His disciple to the pastoral office, so arranged the circumstances of His manifestation of Himself as to fix Peter's attention on the Apostleship with which he had been honored, and on the apostasy by which he had deserved to forfeit it altogether. Nothing could be better constructed to fix his attention on the apostleship than a miracle most accurately resembling that which had first moved him to forsake all and follow Christ; and, accordingly, after another night of fruitless toil, the net is again ordered to be cast into the sea, and again incloses a huge multitude of fishes. But how, upon this wild sea-shore, is he to be forcibly reminded of his apostasy? What shall people that shore with recollections of the scene of disaster and shame? Nay, if it was by "a fire of coals" that the recreant Apostle stood when he thrice denied his Lord, and if "a fire of coals" were among the last things to be looked for on the solitary coast, it might be hard to say what could have been better fitted than a "fire of coals" to fill Peter with a remembrance of his terrible fall. Oh it must have been to him as though there thronged up from the past the taunting questions of the servants, and his own fierce execrations,

and the shrill crowing of the cock, and the piercing subduing look of his Lord, when, so soon as he was come to land, he "saw a fire of coals there," lighted he knew not how, but for what he could not doubt.

But whilst we think that such an explanation agrees admirably with many of the circumstances of the case, and is replete with interest and instruction, we cannot give it you as in every respect satisfactory. Indeed, it manifestly does not meet the whole of the facts. It gives no account of the preparations which had been made for a repast, nor of the reckoning up the fish, nor of the directing that certain of the fish just caught should be dressed in addition to those already prepared—a significant circumstance beyond doubt; for He who had miraculously provided a certain quantity, and laid it on the coals, as if to await the landing of the disciples, might undoubtedly have caused that this certain quantity should be enough, and that there should be no need for waiting till a portion of the fresh draught were dressed. We have still, then, to seek an explanation which shall satisfy all parts of the narrative: and this, we think, is to be found in the progress of the Gospel, and the connection between the old and new dispensations.

In one of our Lord's parables, the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a net, which, being cast into the sea, "gathered of every kind;" so that we may be said to have Christ's own authority for considering that the miraculous draught of fishes represented the bringing of multitudes into the Church through the instrumentality of the preachers of the Gospel. It is observable also that Simon Peter is said to have drawn the net to land: there may have been a reference here to the fact, that, in reward of his noble confession of Christ, Peter was entrusted with the opening the Church to the Gentiles: he it was, who, instructed by a vision from God, admitted by baptism Cornelius and his friends to the privileges of Christianity. For there can be no doubt, that in this second miraculous draught of fishes, there was a special reference to the combining of all nations in the visible Church. The number of fishes is to be carefully noted;

an hundred and fifty and three; and so also is the remark of the Evangelist, "And for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken." As to the number, it appears that one hundred and fifty and three was exactly the number of kinds, or varieties of fish then known; so that we may most justly conclude that the number was an indication that persons of all nations and conditions should enter into the Church. And then the remark as to the net not being broken, though it inclosed so many fish, must be considered as prophetic of the capacity of the Christian Church; unlike the Jewish, which was not constructed for enlargement and extension, the Christian Church might embrace the ends of the earth, and not be overcharged, whatever the multitude and variety of converts. So far, there is little difficulty in assigning the parabolic character of the narrative before us; every one may readily follow the facts, and be aware of their typical import.

But, now, we come again to the "fire of coals," and the prepared repast—what truths did these symbolically teach, when taken, as they must be, in immediate connection with the other figurative facts? My brethren, you are to observe and remember, that the Jewish and the Christian dispensations are not so truly distinct and detached economies, as component parts of one great plan and arrangement. There have never been two ways in which sinners might be saved: in the Old Testament, as in the New, "everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, being both God and man." In the New Testament, indeed, we have the clearer exposition of the great scheme of mercy: God's wondrous purpose of saving the Church through the sacrifice of His only-begotten Son is there set forth with a fulness and precision, which it were vain to seek in the writings of the Old. Nevertheless, there is no difference whatsoever in the doctrine propounded, but only in the measure of its revelation; and, however great the change which was made through the coming of Christ, when external distinctions were swept away, and life and immortality especially brought to light, there still went on the original process for the deliverance

of the fallen race of man. The process was but continued, though with less of veil and obscurity; and they who were the first inclosed within what might in strictness be styled the Gospel net, were caught—to keep up the metaphor—within the same meshes, and drawn to shore through the same instrumentality, as men of olden times, the righteous who obtained eternal life by the assistance of the patriarchal, or of the legal dispensation.

But let us see whether this great truth may not have been figuratively taught by the facts of which we are endeavoring to find an explanation. There was already a fire kindled, when the Apostles dragged to shore the net which specially represented the Christian Church, the Church, that is, as it was to subsist in its expanded form, subsequently to the coming of Christ. And on the fire which was thus burning, there were fish already laid: yea, and the first direction to the Apostles was, that they should bring of the fish which had just been caught, and add them to those which were already on the coals. Now, since by the fish of all kinds, which the net inclosed, we are undoubtedly to understand the members of the Church, under the Gospel dispensation, ought we not to understand, by the fish already on the coals, the members of the Church under the Jewish dispensation? This is nothing but preserving, or keeping up the metaphor. If the fish just caught represented the converts that would be made by the preaching of the Gospel, the fish which had been caught before, and not by those who now drew the net to land, may—we should rather say, must—represent those of whom the Church had been composed during the ministrations of the law. So that the visible Church before Christ was figured by the fish already on the coals, the visible Church after Christ by the fish just inclosed in the net; and when the newly-caught fish were placed on the same fire with those which had been previously secured, was it not shown that the visible Church, before and after the coming of Christ, was virtually but one and the same? that its members, at whatever time they lived, had to be brought to the same altar, and to be purified by the same flame? I know not why we should not think that that strange

fire, mysteriously kindled on the lonely shore, was typical of the propitiatory work of the Redeemer, through whom alone the men of any age can be presented as a sacrifice acceptable unto God. We have all to be laid upon an altar; we have all, as it were, to be subjected to the action of fire: but there is no altar but the one Mediator, and no fire but that of his one great oblation, which will answer for those who seek to consecrate themselves, a whole burnt offering, to their Creator in heaven.

And what could be a more lively parable of this fact, than that, just before his departure from earth, when standing on the margin of the sea, the separating-line, so to speak, between time and eternity, Christ caused an altar to rise, mysterious as Himself—for no human hands reared it,—and crowned it with burning coals, which had not been kindled by any earthly flame; and then brought about that there should be placed on this sacred and significant fire representatives of the one visible Church, as it had subsisted before his incarnation, and as it was to subsist till He should come the second time to judgment?

It seems to have been a lesson peculiarly needed by the Apostles, that they were but following up the labors of the men of earlier times; that they were not to consider themselves as going forth on a new mission, of which no notices had been previously issued; but rather as charged with the fresh proclamation of truths which had been continuously, though more obscurely, announced. There was naturally great likelihood that the first preachers of Christianity, having to publish the wondrous and startling facts of Christ's birth, and death, and resurrection, would overlook the close connection between the old and the new dispensation. Accordingly Christ had forcibly reminded them of it when He said, "Herein is that saying true, One sower, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor; other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors." And now he repeats something of the same lesson, conveying it, not through words, but through expressive emblems or figures. He gives them a miraculous draught of fishes: and for-

asmuch as He had before, in a parable, likened the kingdom of heaven to a net which gathered of all kinds, they would naturally consider these fishes as representing the converts to the Christian religion. But they were not to suppose that these converts formed a separate body, or were to be saved by different means, from the servants of God under earlier dispensations. The Church in all ages was one, and one also was the mode of deliverance. How shall this be shown, so as to keep up the lesson, or rather the emblem of the net and the draught? Indeed, whether the Apostles understood it or not at the first, we may venture to say that the truths, that there had never been but one altar for the sinful, never but one cleansing, consecrating flame, and that the righteous, however separated by time, and by external ordinances and privileges, had communion and fellowship in one and the same mystic body,—that these truths could not have been more significantly exhibited to them, nor more consistently with the emblem of the miraculous draught, than when, "so soon as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon and bread," and received immediately this direction from Christ, "Bring of the fish which ye have now caught."

Now it can hardly be said that there is any part of the remarkable transaction before us which does not thus find a consistent interpretation. It is true, indeed, that we have made no observation on there having been bread as well as fish already provided; whereas the Evangelist is careful in noting it, and in afterwards mentioning that our Lord took of both, of the bread and the fish, and gave to his disciples. But we may readily allow that different ends were subserved by the same series of facts: it is never required, in the interpretation of a parable, whether delivered in word or by action, that every minute particular should be made to shadow forth a truth. When we interpreted the facts with a special reference to the case of St. Peter, we had no use to make either of the fish, or of the bread: but we do not on that account conclude that the fire of coals might not have been instrumental, or might not have been designed as instrumental, to the recalling to the Apostle the cir-

cumstances of his fearful apostasy. In like manner, if there be no special significance in the bread, when the narrative is applied to the shadowing out the progress of the Gospel, and the oneness of the Church under various dispensations, we do not think this any objection to the fitness of the application: we suppose that the refreshment of the wearied disciples was one of the purposes for which the fire had been kindled, and the food prepared; and there was use for the bread in regard of this purpose, if not of any other.

Though it would not be hard to believe that the fish and the bread were combined with a higher intent. Christ, you will remember, had fed a great multitude with a few loaves and fishes, typifying how the truths and doctrines of his religion should suffice for the spiritual sustenance of the world. The disciples would naturally be reminded of this miracle, when Jesus again took bread and fish, and distributed amongst them—reminded too (and what parting lesson could be more important?) that the food which Christ delivered to them as spiritual pastors, would be an abundant provision for the men of all ages and countries.

But, now, considering that a sufficient and consistent interpretation has been assigned to the several parts of the narrative before us, we would show you, in conclusion, into how beautiful an allegory some of the facts may be wrought, when a broader view is taken, one which shall more distinctly comprehend ourselves. We would not, indeed, claim, for what we have now to advance, the character of an explanation, or interpretation, of the significative circumstances—it is at best but an accommodation of the parable: but when a portion of Scripture has been expounded, as if relating rather to others than to ourselves, it is both lawful and useful to search for some personal application, that we may feel our own interest, and find our own profit, in the passage reviewed.

It is a natural and appropriate simile which likens life to a voyage, a voyage which has variety of terminations—sometimes in calm, sometimes in storm; the vessel, in one case, casting anchor in placid waters, so that the spirit has but, if we may use the expression, to

step gently ashore; in another, suffering shipwreck, so that there is fearful strife and peril in escaping from the waves. We shall all reach the shore of another world: for though some may be said to be thrown violently on that shore, whilst others are landed on it, as though by the kind ministry of angels, none can perish as if existence might terminate at death; of all it will have to be said, as of those with St. Paul in the ship, some by swimming, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship, "it came to pass that they escaped all safe to land."

And there is something of a delineation of this variety of modes of death, in Peter's struggling through the water, whilst the other disciples approach the shore in their boat. Peter's is the violent death, the death of the martyr; but his companions find a gentler dismissal from the flesh; theirs is the natural death, death with fewer of the accompaniments which invest the last act with terror and awfulness. Yet, die when we will, and how we will, there is a mysteriousness about the moment of dissolution, which must cause it to be expected with some measure of fear and apprehension. The passing in that moment from time to eternity—the becoming in that instant a disembodied spirit, a naked, unclothed soul, launched upon an unknown scene, with none of the instruments heretofore employed for the ingathering of knowledge, or the communication of thought—oh, who ever marked, so far as it can be marked, the noiseless flitting away of man's immortal part, without experiencing a painful inquisitiveness as to what had become of that part, as to where it was, as to what it saw, as to what it heard? There may be a thorough assurance that the soul has gone to be with the Lord; but whilst this destroys all anxiety on its account, it does not, cannot, repress the striving of the mind to follow it in its flight, the intense gaze at the folds of the veil which hangs between the present world and the future, as if it must have been so far withdrawn for the admission of the spirit just freed from flesh, that some glimpse might be caught by the watchful of the unexplored region beyond.

But in vain this striving of the mind, this intenseness of the gaze. Whilst

we live, it is as an infinite desert, which no thought can traverse, that separates the two worlds; though, when we come to die, it will be found but a line, like that which the last wave leaves on a sandy shore. Let it satisfy us, in the meanwhile, that whatever the mode in which the soul of the righteous is dismissed—whether that mode be imaged in Peter's casting himself into the sea, and struggling to the land, or whether it be represented in the quieter approachings of the boat with the other disciples—the soul will find preparation, as it were, for its reception: Christ stands upon the shore, expecting his faithful servants; and of all of them it will have to be said, in the words of our text, "As soon as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread." Oh, this may well shadow out, what we have abundant warrant for believing from more express statements of Scripture, that, to the faithful in Christ, the moment of being detached from the body is the moment of being admitted into happiness. "As soon as they were come to land"—no delay, no interval—all that was needed was found ready; the fire kindled, and the banquet spread.

Yet who doubts that the righteous will not only find the material of happiness prepared, but that they will carry with them, so to speak, additions to that

material, and make heaven all the richer and the brighter by their arrival? It is "the communion of saints;" and whilst each saint shall draw cause of rapture from those who have gone before, they also shall draw cause of rapture from him. Ah, then, how beautifully apposite the direction, "Bring of the fish which ye have now caught." The banquet, the marriage-supper of the Lamb, shall be furnished from the contributions of every generation; all that any man, in any age, has been enabled to accomplish in works of righteousness and faith, every spiritual battle won, every convert made, shall be mingled in that vast store of happiness, of which the glorified Church shall everlastingly partake.

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." They "rest from their labors," in that, as soon as they come to land, they see a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread: "their works do follow them," in that they are then bidden to bring of the fish which they have caught. Oh, that we may all so labor during life, that hereafter, when judged, as we must be, by our works, there may be found, not indeed—what can never be—a claim to the happiness of heaven, but an evidence of our having loved the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth.

SERMON III.

THE FINDING THE GUEST-CHAMBER.

"And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the good man of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us."—ST. MARK, xiv. 13, 14, 15.

The time was now at hand when our Lord was to complete, by the sacrifice of Himself, the great work for which He had taken upon Him our nature. He had wrought miracle upon miracle, in evidence of a divine commission; and He had delivered discourse upon discourse, in illustration of the dispensation which he had come to introduce. But without shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin; and all his actions, and sermons, had been but preparatory to a wondrous and fearful occurrence, the surrender of Himself to the will of his enemies, to the death of a malefactor.

The disciples should have been aware—for Christ gave them frequent warning—that the time of separation from their Master was almost arrived, and that the separation would be effected in a manner most trying to their faith. Yet they appear to have closed their eyes, in a great degree, to the coming events: after all which had been done to prepare them, they were taken by surprise, and seemed as bewildered and confounded by what befel Christ, as though He had not, in the most express terms, forewarned them of his crucifixion and burial. This arose from their unbelief and hardness of heart: they had not yet divested themselves of the thought and hope of a temporal kingdom; and, whatever the process by which they contrived to explain away, or hide from themselves, the clear statements of our Lord, it is manifest that they had virtually no expectation that Christ would be nailed to the cross,

and that his dying this shameful death passed with them as well-nigh a proof, that He could not be the deliverer promised unto Israel.

But it is beautiful to observe what pains, so to speak, were taken by the compassionate Savior to fortify the disciples, to arm them for the approaching days of temptation and disaster. We have at other times shown you how this tender consideration for his followers may be traced in the arrangements which He made for his last entry into Jerusalem, in accomplishment of the prophecy of Zechariah, that her King should come to Zion, sitting upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. It was in a strange and circuitous way that Christ provided Himself with the animal on which He was to ride. He sent two of his disciples to a particular spot, informing them that they should there find an ass and a colt. He directed them to take possession of these animals, and lead them away, as though they had been their own. He furnished them with certain words, in reply to any remonstrance which the owners might make, and assured them that these words would induce the owners to part with their property. How singular, how intricate a mode of obtaining, what probably would have been brought Him, had He merely mentioned his wish to any one in the multitude. But was there not good reason for his preferring this circuitous method? We may be sure there was; even as, when the tribute money had to be paid, there was good reason for his sending Peter

to the sea, and making him find the piece of money in the mouth of the fish which he first caught, in place of producing, as He might have done, the money at once, divesting the miracle of all intricate accompaniments. And there is no difficulty in assigning reasons for the method which our Lord took to procure the humble equipage of which He had need. The foreknowledge which He displayed as to mean and inconsiderable things, such as the ass and her colt; the influence which, though at a distance, He put forth upon the owners, inducing them to part with their property,—these surely were calculated to convince the disciples (and upon no point, at that moment, had they greater need of assurance) that Christ would have his eye upon them in their poverty and distress, and that his not being visibly present, would in no degree interfere with his power of subduing his enemies, and sustaining his friends.

But our Lord was not content with having, in this signal instance, furnished his followers with such evidences of his prescience and power, as were most adapted to prepare them for the oncoming trial. In the course of a very few days, and when the time of his crucifixion was close at hand, He took a similar roundabout way of obtaining what He needed, with the intent, as we may believe, of again impressing on the disciples the truths which would best support them in their approaching tribulation. Our Lord was now in Bethany, in the confines of Jerusalem, awaiting the final act of rejection by the Jews. The first day of the feast of unleavened bread having arrived, the disciples came to Him, saying, "Where wilt thou that we go and prepare, that thou mayest eat the passover?" This was a very simple question, supposing, as was undoubtedly the case, that Christ had determined in what house he would partake of the last supper with his followers. And He might have delivered a very simple answer, indicating the street in the city, and the name of the householder. This is what would most naturally have been done under ordinary circumstances, but our Lord, as you will observe, took a wholly different course. In place of a simple answer, He gave the most complicated directions. He tells his disciples to go

into the city, mentioning no particular quarter, but bidding them proceed till they should meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. They were to follow this man—not to speak to him, with the view of ascertaining whether he were the right person to follow—but to follow him, and to enter any house into which he might go. They were then to accost the master of this house—not, as it would appear, the same person as they had been following—but they were to accost him without ceremony, in an abrupt manner, as making a claim, rather than as preferring a request. "The Master saith, Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?" Christ assured his messengers, that, upon this, a large upper room would be shown them, "furnished and prepared." Thus, accordingly, it came to pass. We read in the next verse, "His disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as He had said unto them."

But you can hardly read of so intricate a way of doing a simple thing, and not ask—as in regard of the mode of obtaining the ass and the colt—why did our Lord take so roundabout a method? why did He not go more directly to his end? We may be sure that there were good reasons: these reasons, we may believe, are still to be found in the circumstances of the disciples, and in the desire of Christ to strengthen them for the trial which was now close at hand; and we invite you to an attentive survey of the several particulars specified in our text, that you may the better judge whether it was not with a wise and tender regard for those from whom He was so soon to be separated, that Jesus, in place of sending Peter and John direct to the house where He designed to eat the passover, bade them go into the city, and look out for, and follow, "a man bearing a pitcher of water."

Now, let the preparation have been ever so labored and explicit, it cannot be denied that it was a great trial of faith which the disciples were about to undergo, in beholding their Master given up to the wiles of his enemies, and in being themselves exposed to fierce persecution. Even had they thoroughly understood, and apprehended, the predictions of Christ in regard of his own

betrayal and death, it could not have been other than a terrible shock, a shock calculated to overthrow all but the very firmest trust, when the powers of darkness seemed to triumph, and evil angels, and evil men, prevailed against righteousness. It must then have been a great thing for the disciples, that faith should be kept in exercise up to the very time when so vast a demand was to be made upon its energies; for, assuredly, in proportion as faith was left inactive till summoned to face the shame of the cross, would be the likelihood of its then giving way, as not having been practised in lesser encounters. Faith, like other powers, is strengthened through use; and every believer must feel, that if, after a long period of comparative peace and security, he is suddenly met by an extraordinary onset of trial, there is much greater risk of his being confounded and overborne, than if the extraordinary onset were to come after a lengthened series of less virulent assaults. The spiritual arm, as well as the bodily, becomes fitted for encounter with the giant, through frequent encounters with formidable, but not as formidable, adversaries; though either, if exposed, without this previous discipline, to a contest with Goliath of Gath, might prove wholly insufficient, and give way at once, having scarce attempted the battle. It was after having met the lion and the bear, that David went forth to meet the uncircumcised Philistine.

And we might expect that Christ, knowing to how great effort the faith of his followers was about to be called, would, in his compassionate earnestness for their welfare, keep their faith in exercise up to the moment of the dreaded separation. He would find, or make occasions for trying and testing the principles which were soon to be brought to so stern a proof. Did He do this? and how did he do it? We regard the circumstances which are now under review, those connected with the finding the guest-chamber in which the last supper might be eaten, as an evidence and illustration of Christ's exercising the faith of his disciples.

Was it not exercising the faith of Peter and John—for these, the more distinguished of the disciples, were employed on the errand—to send them into the city with such strange and desul-

tory directions? How natural for them to have said, why not tell us at once the house to which we are to go? we shall perhaps meet a dozen men, each bearing a pitcher of water; we are as likely to follow the wrong as the right; and as to entering a stranger's house, and abruptly requiring him to show us the guest-chamber, how improbable is it that we shall meet with any thing but insult, insult which will really be deserved, considering that we shall have taken an inexcusable liberty. There were so many chances, if the word may be used, against the guest-chamber being found through the circuitous method prescribed by our Lord, that we could not have wondered, had Peter and John shown reluctance to obey his command. And we do not doubt that what are called the chances, were purposely multiplied by Christ, to make the finding the room seem more improbable, and therefore to give faith the greater exercise. It could be no unusual thing for a man to be carrying a pitcher of water—Christ might have given some more remarkable sign. But it was its not being remarkable which made place for faith. Again, there would have been risk enough of mistake or repulse, in accosting the man with the pitcher; but this man was only to be followed; and he might stop at many houses before he reached the right; and the master of the house might be from home—how many contingencies might have been avoided, if Christ would but have given more explicit directions. But Christ would not be more explicit, because, in proportion as He had been more explicit, there would have been less exercise for faith.

And if you imagine that, after all, it was no great demand on the faith of Peter and John, that they should go on so vague an errand—for that much did not hinge on their finding the right place, and they had but to return, if any thing went wrong—we are altogether at issue with you. I have no hesitation in maintaining, that any one of you would have been loath to go into Jerusalem for such a purpose, and with such directions; ay, more loath than to undertake some signal enterprise, manifestly requiring high courage and fortitude. There was something that looked degrading and ignoble in the errand—

men who could work miracles, and who had been with Christ when transfigured, being sent to look about the streets for a man bearing a pitcher of water, and to enter a stranger's house where they were only likely to meet rudeness.

And the apparent meanness of an employment will often try faith more than its apparent difficulty; the exposure to ridicule and contempt will require greater moral nerve than the exposure to danger and death. How should it be otherwise, when genuine humility is among the hardest things to acquire and maintain: and when, consequently, whatsoever goes directly to the mortifying pride will more touch men to the quick, than any amount of effort, or of sacrifice, round which may be thrown something of a lofty or chivalrous aspect? Oh, do not tell us of great faith as required only for the following Christ bearing his cross—there was great faith required also for the following the man bearing the pitcher. Tell us not of its being a hard task to go in unto Pharaoh, and to say, "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go;" it was a hard task also to go in unto the stranger, and say, "Thus saith the Master, Where is the guest-chamber?"

We believe that it is very frequently ordered that faith should be disciplined and nurtured for its hardest endurances, and its highest achievements, through exposure to petty inconveniences, collisions with mere rudeness, the obloquy of the proud, the sneer of the supercilious, and the incivility of the ignorant. Men have looked wonderingly, as some unflinching confessor, some candidate for the bloody crown of martyrdom, has stepped forth from ranks which had only simple duties to discharge, and common trials to face, and displayed a constancy, and a courage, surpassing those exhibited by Christians trained in higher schools of experience. But they have forgotten, or they have not known, that no where is faith so well disciplined as in humble occupations, that it grows great through little tasks, and may be more exercised by being kept to the menial business of a servant, than by being summoned to the lofty standing of a leader. They have forgotten, or they have not known, that the uncourteous repulses, the ungracious slights, the contemptuous insults, to which a

Christian may be exposed in acting out his Christianity in every-day life, and amid the most common-place circumstances, put his principles to severe proof, or keep them in full work; and that the very fact of his having moved in so humble a sphere, and been plied with trials so unostentatious and petty, has had a direct tendency to the hardening him for conflict, ay, though it might be with "principalities and powers."

And it seems to us that Christ was practically teaching, and illustrating all this, in the course which he took with his disciples, as the time of their great trial drew near. We may justly assume that He sought to prepare them for this trial, that it was his object to keep their faith exercised, that the likelihood might be less of its giving way at the last. And his method of exercise was by employing them on errands which threatened to be fruitless, and seemed to be degrading. Five days before his crucifixion, He sends two disciples to look for an ass and a colt, where they were perhaps little likely to be found, and to remove them at the risk of being regarded as robbers, and therefore treated with insult or violence. And now two days before his crucifixion, He sends two disciples to find him a place where He may celebrate the passover; but He seems to take pains, not only to avoid the being simple in his directions, but to make those directions involve as many probabilities as possible of what would be irksome and unpleasant, as much exposure as possible to mistake, repulse, contempt—the very things from which men are most ready to shrink—for He bids his disciples walk the city till they meet a man bearing a pitcher of water, follow that man, enter any house into which he might go, and accost the master of the house with the unceremonious message, "The Master saith, Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?"

We should, however, be taking only a contracted view of the circumstances before us, if we considered them merely with reference to an exercise of faith, as though Christ's only object had been the disciplining his disciples for the shame of the cross, by employing them on errands from which their pride would revolt. That this was one great object,

we think it lawful to infer, as well from the nature of the case, as from the resemblance of the proceeding to that which had occurred but three days before, when the two disciples were dispatched for the ass and the colt. You can hardly fail to admit, that the same principle must have been at work in the two cases—so similarly are the chances of mistake and repulse multiplied, and, with these, the chances of insult; our Lord is evidently carrying on a system, a system, if we may use the expression, of humiliating errands, as though He would thereby prepare his followers to face persecution in its more awful forms.

And we do earnestly desire of you to bear this in mind; for men, who are not appointed to great achievements and endurance, are very apt to feel as though there were not enough, in the trials and duties of a lowly station, for the nurture and exercise of high Christian graces. Whereas, if it were by merely following a man bearing a pitcher of water that Apostles were trained for the worst onsets of evil, there may be no such school for the producing strong faith as that in which the lessons are of the most every-day kind. It is a remarkable saying of our blessed Lord, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." "Take up his cross daily"—then there is a cross to be borne every day: the cross is not to be carried only on great occasions; the cross is to be carried daily: a true Christian will find the cross, nay, cannot miss the cross, in the events, the duties, the trials, of every day—else how is he to "take up his cross daily!" how to follow Christ daily? Ah, we are too apt to think that taking up the cross, and following Christ, are singular things, things for peculiar seasons and extraordinary circumstances. Let us learn, and let us remember, that, on the contrary, they may, they must, be of every day occurrence; and let it serve to explain how they may be of daily occurrence, that, when Christ would school his disciples to face the perils of following Him as He ascended Mount Calvary, He set them to face the unpleasantness of following a man bearing a pitcher of water.

But there is more than this to be said in regard of the complicated way in

which Christ directed his disciples to the guest-chamber where He had determined to eat the last supper. He was not only exercising the faith of the disciples, by sending them on an errand which seemed unnecessarily intricate, and to involve great exposure to insult and repulse—He was giving strong evidence of his thorough acquaintance with every thing that was to happen, and of his power over the minds whether of strangers or of friends. In proportion as there seemed a great many chances against the right room being found by the disciples, was the proof, as you must all admit, when the room was nevertheless found, that the prescience, or foreknowledge, of Christ extended to minute or inconsiderable particulars. You must consider it as a prophecy, on the part of Christ, that the man would be met, bearing a pitcher of water; that, if followed, he would enter the right house; that the master of this house, on being asked by the disciples, would show them "a large upper-room furnished and prepared," where they might make ready for the eating the passover. But it was a prophecy of no ordinary kind. It was a prophecy which seemed to take delight in putting difficulties in the way of its own precise accomplishment. It would not have been accomplished by the mere finding the house—it would have been defeated, had the house been found through any other means than the meeting the man, or had the man been discovered through any other sign than the pitcher of water: yea, and it would have been defeated, defeated in the details, which were given, as it might have seemed, with such unnecessary and perilous minuteness, if the master of the house had made the least objection, or if it had not been an upper-room which he showed the disciples, or if that room had not been large, or if it had not been furnished and prepared. If Christ had merely sent the disciples to a particular house, telling them that they would there find a guest-chamber, there might, or there might not have been prophecy; the master of the house might have been one of Christ's adherents, and Christ might previously have held with Him some private communication, arranging for the celebration of the passover. But our Lord put it beyond controversy

that there was no pre-arranged scheme, but that He was distinctly exercising his own prophetic power, by making the whole thing turn on the meeting a man with a pitcher of water. For though you may say that this might have been part of a plot or confederacy, our Lord having agreed with the householder that his servant should be standing, with a particular burden, at a particular place, and at a particular time, yet, surely, on the least reflection, you must allow that no sagacious person, who had thought it worth while to make a plot at all, would have made one so likely to be defeated—for what more likely than that, in the streets of a crowded city, several persons would be met, about the same time, with so common a thing as a pitcher of water? or than that the disciples, loitering a little on the road, or going a different way, would just miss the encounter on which the whole thing depended?

The supposition of any thing of plot, or confederacy, is excluded by the commonness of the specified occurrences; and then, on the other hand, this very commonness should serve to make what must have been prophecy all the more wonderful; for to be able to foresee, with most perfect distinctness, that the man would be met, that the disciples would follow the right person, that they would be taken to the right house, that they would be shown the right room—nay, you may speak of the marvellousness of foreseeing an empire's rise, or an empire's fall; but there might really be greater scope for the keen conjecture, or the sagacious guess, of a farsighted man, in the probable revolutions of states, than in the pitcher of water, and the furnished guest-chamber.

And whatever tended to prove to the disciples their Master's thorough acquaintance with every future contingency, ought to have tended to the preparing them for the approaching days of disaster and separation. For how could they think that any thing, which was about to happen to Christ, would happen by chance, without having been accurately foreknown by Him, and fore-ordained, when He showed that his prescience extended to such inconsiderable particulars as were involved in the errand on which they had been sent? And what right had they to be stagger-

ed by what befel Christ, if nothing befel Him which He had not expected, and for which He had not provided? If He foresaw the man with the pitcher, He must have foreseen Himself with the cross—and surely, if He thoroughly foreknew what was coming upon Him, this very circumstance should have sufficed to prove Him more than human; and, if more than human, what was there to be staggered at in the shame of his cross?

Besides, it was beautifully adapted to the circumstances of the disciples, that Christ showed that his foreknowledge extended to trifles. These disciples were likely to imagine, that, being poor and mean persons, they should be overlooked by Christ, when separated from them, and, perhaps, exalted to glory. And the showing them that his eye was on the movements of the Roman governor, or on the secret gatherings of the Pharisees, would not have sufficed to prevent, or destroy, this imagination; for Pilate and the Pharisees occupied prominent places, and might be expected to fix Christ's attention. But that his eye was threading the crowded thoroughfares of the city, that it was noting a servant with a pitcher of water, observing accurately when this servant left his master's house, when he reached the well, and when he would be at a particular spot on his way back—ah, this was not merely wonderful foreknowledge; this was foreknowledge applying itself to the insignificant and unknown: Peter and John might have obtained little comfort from Christ's proving to them that He watched a Cæsar on the throne; but it ought to have been surprisingly cheering to them, his proving that He watched a poor slave at the fountain.

Then, again, observe that whatever power was here put forth by Christ, was put forth without his being in contact with the party on whom it was exerted. Had He gone Himself to the householder, and in person demanded the accommodation which He needed, the result might have been ascribed to his presence; there was no resisting, it might have been said, one whose word was always "with power." Whereas, the householder surrendered his property on the strength of the message, "The Master saith," as the owners had surrendered the ass and the colt, on be-

ing told, "The Lord hath need of them." Christ acted, that is, upon parties who were at a distance from Him, thus giving incontrovertible proof, that his visible presence was not necessary in order to the exercise of his power. What a comfort should this have been to the disciples, informing and assuring them that Christ's removal from them would in no degree interfere with his protection and guardianship; if from Bethany Christ could make the householder in Jerusalem throw open his guest-chamber, Peter might have learnt that, from heaven, Christ could make the prison-doors fly open for his escape.

Were not then all the details of the errand before us, even when you leave out the exercise of the faith of the disciples, every way worthy of the wisdom and goodness of our Lord, expressive of his tender consideration for the circumstances of his followers, and of his desire to afford them the instruction and encouragement which might best fit them for coming duties and trials? Indeed, it is easy to imagine how, when his death was near at hand, Christ might have wrought miracles, and uttered prophecies, more august in their character, and more adapted to the excitement of amazement and awe. He might have darkened the air with portents and prodigies, and have brought up from the future magnificent processions of thrones and principalities. But there would not have been, in these gorgeous or appalling displays, the sort of evidence which was needed by disquieted and dispirited men, whose meanness suggested to them a likelihood of their being overlooked, and who, expecting to be separated from their Master, might fear that the separation would remove them from his care. And this evidence, the evidence that Jesus had his eye on those whom the world might neglect or despise, and that He did not require to be visibly present, whether to keep down an enemy or support a friend—ah, this was given, so that the disciples might have taken it, in all its preciousness, to themselves, when every thing came to pass which had been involved in or indicated by the directions, "Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the good man of the house, The Mas-

ter saith, Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?"

And should we be warranted in assigning any thing of a more typical or symbolical meaning to the directions which were thus issued by our Lord? Indeed, in so doing, we should not be without the sanction of eminent interpreters, whilst the accuracy and beauty of the type must readily commend themselves to every thoughtful mind. It was not for the mere purpose of celebrating the passover that our blessed Lord sought a guest-chamber where He might eat his last supper with his disciples. Then and there was He to institute that commemorative, that sacrificial rite, in and through which the Church, in all ages, was to feed on his body, and drink of his precious blood. The supper was to be concluded by his taking bread, and blessing it into the sacramental representative of his flesh, wine into the sacramental representative of his blood; and by the issuing of a solemn injunction that the like should ever after be done in devout remembrance of Himself. Thus, in that guest-chamber, was the feast on the paschal lamb to be virtually abolished; but only that there might be ordained in its stead a profounder and more pregnant mystery, the feast on the true Paschal Lamb, partaking of which the faithful, to the end of time, might apprehend and appropriate the benefits of the all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world.

But the sacrament of the body and blood of our blessed Redeemer is for those only who have been duly initiated by the sacrament of baptism into the visible Church. It is not the initiatory sacrament, not that through which we are first grafted into Christ, and made members of his mystical body; but that through which, having by another ordinance been born again, and received into the family of God, we are kept in that holy fellowship, and nurtured up to everlasting life. Hence the one sacrament, whose outward sign is water, is preparatory to the other sacrament, whose outward part or sign is bread and wine; and it were, indeed, the most perilous invasion of the highest privilege of Christians, were any, who had not been washed in the laver of regeneration, to intrude themselves at that table where,

in awful remembrance, and effectual significance, there is distributed that flesh which is meat indeed, and that blood which is drink indeed.

But was not all this, in a measure, shadowed out—or, if not intentionally shadowed out, may it not be lawfully traced—in Christ's directions to his disciples on which we have discoursed? How were the disciples to find out the guest-chamber? By following a man "bearing a pitcher of water." The water was, it as were, to lead them into the guest-chamber, the chamber where they were to find the body and blood of their Lord. You may pronounce this nothing but an accidental coincidence, if, indeed, you will presume to speak of any thing as accidental, undesigned, and insignificant, in the actions and appointments of Christ. But we cannot help counting the coincidence too exact, and too definite, to have not been intended—at least, if we may not use it in confirmation, we may in illustration of a doctrine. The disciples, indeed, may have attached no symbolical meaning to the pitcher of water: they were in quest only of a room in which to eat the pass-over, and knew nothing of the solemn rite about to be instituted. Hence, to them there would be nothing in the pitcher of water, but a mark by which to know into what house to enter. But to ourselves, who are looking for the guest-chamber, not as the place where the paschal lamb may be eaten, but as that where Christ is to give of his own body and blood, the pitcher of water may well serve as a memento that it is baptism which admits us into Christian privileges, that they, who find a place at the supper of the Lord, must have met the man with the water, and have

followed that man—must have been presented to the minister of the Church, and have received from him the initiatory sacrament; and then have submitted meekly to the guidance of the Church, till introduced to those deeper recesses of the sanctuary, where Christ spreads his rich banquet for such as call upon his name.

Thus may there have been, in the directions for finding the guest-chamber, a standing intimation of the process through which should be sought an entrance to that upper room, where Christ and his members shall finally sit down, that they may eat together at the marriage supper. For the communion of the body and blood of the Redeemer is itself to "show forth the Lord's death" only "till He come," and shall give place, as the passover gave place to it, to a richer banquet, in a yet higher apartment of the heavenly kingdom. That apartment, too, like the upper room in Jerusalem, is large, and furnished, and prepared—large enough to admit us all, furnished and prepared with whatsoever can minister to happiness. And having been admitted by baptism into the Church below, having sought continued supplies of grace in the upper room, at the altar where the Master is "evidently set forth, crucified among" us—ay, having thus, in the simplicity of faith and obedience, submitted ourselves to Christ's ordinances, because they are his ordinances, as did the disciples to his directions, because they were his directions, we may humbly hope to pass hereafter into that yet loftier abode—more truly "the large upper room"—where Christ shall everlastingly give his people of his fulness, and make them drink of his pleasures as out of a river.

SERMON IV.

THE SPECTRE'S SERMON A TRUISM.

"Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice, saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker?"—Job iv. 15, 16, 17.

Every one must, of course, be aware that, whilst the Bible is throughout to be implicitly depended on, as neither recording historically anything but facts, nor delivering didactically anything but truths, it does not follow that every passage may, in the strictest sense, be taken as the word of God. In the historical parts of Scripture, the sayings, as well as the actions of various persons are registered; and whilst in many instances the actions are such as God did not approve, in others the sayings are such as He did not inspire.

It does not then follow, that, because words are found in the Bible, they may be taken as announcing some truth on which the preacher may safely proceed to discourse. They may be the words of a man in whom the Spirit of God did not dwell, of a heathen whose creed was falsehood, or of a blasphemer who despised all authority. In such cases, what is termed the inspiration of Scripture warrants nothing but the faithfulness of the record: we are sure that the sayings set down were actually uttered: the pen of the historian was guided by God's Spirit, but only in regard of the strict office of the historian, that of registering with accuracy certain occurrences. And, of course, if the inspiration extend only to the man who records, and not to him who utters a saying, the saying itself may not be necessarily truth, though the Bible itself undividedly is. In the majority of instances, indeed, we doubt not that the two things concur—the speaker was directed what to say, as well as the historian what to record—or rather, by

directing the historian to insert certain sayings in his book, the Spirit of God may be considered as having appropriated those sayings, and given them in a measure the stamp of his approval.

We here speak especially of the sayings of holy men of old. It would not, of course, be easy to show—nay, we do not suppose it to be true—that, in all which the saints, whether of the old or the new dispensation, are recorded to have said, we may look for the utterances of men immediately and literally inspired. But, nevertheless, we think that, in preserving their sayings, and causing them to be transmitted to all future days, the Spirit of God has so far sanctioned them by his authority, that they should be received by us with much of that reverence which is due to express and explicit revelation.

We make these general remarks, because our text is the utterance of an individual for whom we cannot perhaps claim, on indubitable testimony, that he spake by the Spirit of God. It is Eliphaz the Temanite who speaks, one of those three friends of the afflicted Patriarch Job, who "had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him," but who virtually did little but upbraid the sufferer, aggravating his griefs by injurious suspicions, and false accusations. We are naturally so disposed to feel angry with men who dealt, to all appearance, so harshly with one whose sorrow and patience should have secured him the most tender sympathy, that it would not be difficult to persuade ourselves that their

discourses are not to be taken as part and parcel of the inspired Scripture. But we are able to show, by a simple yet incontestable proof, that, if the Spirit of God did not inspire these men, He has given to their sayings, by placing them within the inspired volume, much of the weight which his own dictation must always impart.

There is probably but one distinct quotation in the New Testament from the Book of Job. St. James, indeed, refers generally to the history of Job, but he does not adduce any words from the narrative. St. Paul, however, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, has quoted from the Book, and that too, with the form, "it is written," which always serves, in the New Testament, to mark what is quoted as part of Holy Scripture, strictly so called. In order to prove his proposition, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God," St. Paul states, "For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." Now it is in the Book of Job that these words are written; and the observable thing is, that they are not words uttered by Job himself, but by that very person, Eliphaz the Temanite, who also delivers the words of our text. We have, therefore, what amounts to conclusive evidence, that, whatever at times the injustice and false reasoning of Eliphaz, the Spirit of God employed him, even as He afterwards did Balaam, in delivering truths for the instruction of the world.

We have desired to make this clear to you, before entering expressly on the examination of the text, because we wished to guard against any suspicion, that we might be laying too much stress on a passage for which we could not claim the full authority that belongs to what the Holy Ghost has indited. Though, indeed, if we could not thus vindicate, in general, the inspired character of the utterances of Eliphaz, there would be little room for doubting, that, in the particular instance which has to come under review, this Temanite spake by the direction of God. He recounts a vision; he records words which were mysteriously brought to him amid the deep silence of the night; and if we could not carry further our confidence in what he said, we might, at least, be sure that what he affirmed had actually

taken place, and that words, which he quoted as delivered to him by an unearthly voice, had indeed been breathed in so startling and impressive a manner.

On every account, therefore, we can plead for our text as having all that claim on your reverential attention which belongs to inspiration in its highest degree. Come, then, with us; and as Eliphaz records what he saw, and what he heard, attend as you would to the utterances of a messenger from the invisible world. We do not want to make the blood run cold, nor to thrill you with a strange and undefinable dread. But, nevertheless, we would use the wild and awful circumstances of the vision to give solemnity to the truth which is brought to our notice; for it may be that with you, as with Eliphaz, there will be a listening with greater abstraction and intensity of feeling, if it be from a dim and flitting image, and after a deep portentous silence, that you hear the questions asked, "Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?"

Now there can be no dispute that we have, in the narrative of Eliphaz, the account of an apparition: a purely spiritual being, such as an angel, assumed a visible though indescribable form, and stood before Eliphaz in the stillness of the night. It is generally regarded as proof of a weak and superstitious mind, to put faith in what are termed ghost stories, tales of apparitions, whether of the dead, or of unknown visitants from the spiritual world. But we do not see why so much of scepticism and ridicule should be afloat on the matter of alleged apparitions. We see nothing, whether in the statements of Scripture, or the deductions of reason, from which to decide that there cannot be apparitions; that the invisible state may never communicate with the visible through the instrumentality of phantoms, strange and boding forms that are manifestly not of this earth. And if you cannot show, either from revelation, or from the nature of things, that apparitions are impossible, of course the truth or falsehood of any alleged case is simply dependent on testimony—no amount of testimony could make me believe that a known impossibility had taken place; but any thing short of a known impossibility might be substantiated by evidence;

and certainly, therefore, an apparition may be substantiated, for no one will ever prove the actual impossibility. There may easily be a weak and fond credulity in regard of ghosts and apparitions; but there may be also, we believe, a cold and hard scepticism: and knowing how thin is the veil which hangs between the visible and invisible worlds, and how transparent that veil is to spiritual beings, though impervious to mortal sight, it might be better for us to be classed with the credulous—if it be credulity to yield on sufficient testimony—than with those who are too enlightened to be superstitious, if superstition be the thinking that God, for wise purposes, may sometimes draw aside the veil, or make it transparent on this side as well as on the other.

Neither should we wonder if much of that dogged resistance, which is opposed to the best authenticated narratives of apparitions, may be traced to men's repugnance to the being brought into contact with the invisible world. They instinctively shrink from communion with a state, which their irrepressible fears people with dark and fitful imagery; and it is, therefore, with them a sort of self-defence, to take refuge in a thorough scorn of the possibility, that spirits, which are verily around them, might assume human shape, and become on a sudden visible and vocal.

It is moreover worth observing, that the Bible, so far from discountenancing the notion of apparitions, may be said to give it the weight of its testimony, and that too in more than one instance. We have already remarked that no more thorough case of apparition can be even imagined, than is put upon record in the narrative of Eliphaz. You could not find, in the most marvellous of ghost stories, more of supernatural demonstration, nor more of that paralyzing effect, which, ever since sin separated between man and God, appears produced, even on the best, by visitations from the spiritual world. The passing of the spirit before the face of Eliphaz; the standing up of the hair of his flesh; the indistinctness, yet truth of the image, so that no straining of the eye could make the form definite, nor any cause it to disperse; and then, after a solemn pause, the deep oracular voice, burdened with weighty question—why, there is nothing

in any book, whether of fiction or fact, which takes greater hold on the imagination, or more exquisitely portrays what might be supposed a case of apparition. If every subsequent tale of supernatural appearance be invention or fable, at least the fable is modelled after a true story; and we should have Scripture from which to prove that there might come an apparition, if we had no human record whatsoever that any had been seen.

Besides—for it might with some justice be said that what happened in early days, when revelation was scant, and God supplied the want by immediate intercourse, ought not to be taken in proof of what may happen in later—if you observe what is recorded of the apostles of Christ, you will find that the notion of apparitions was not only commonly entertained, but that it passed unrebuked by our Savior Himself. When Christ approached his disciples, walking on the sea, we read, "They were troubled, saying, It is a spirit, and they cried out for fear." They evidently supposed that there might be an apparition, that a spirit might assume human form; and though you may say that this arose only from the ignorance and superstition of the disciples, it is, at least, observable that our Lord proceeded immediately to quiet their apprehensions, but not to correct their mistake—"Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."

On the occasion, moreover, of his own Resurrection, he gave yet stronger countenance to the notion that spirits might appear. When he stood suddenly in the midst of the assembled disciples, having entered the chambers though the doors were closed, "they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit." That Christ should have obtained admission, notwithstanding the barred entrance, was a similar phenomenon to his treading the waters as though they had been a solid pavement; and the disciples took refuge in the same supposition, that it was no human being, such as one of themselves, but a spectral thing, which could thus set at nought the laws to which matter is subject. And though it does not appear that, on this occasion, they expressed their apprehensions, Christ knew their thoughts, and at once

took pains to show them their error. But how! not by saying, there are no such things as apparitions, and you are weak, and ignorant, in imagining that spirits ever take form, and come amongst men—which is just what might have been expected from our Lord, the great teacher of the world, had there been an error to correct—but by showing that He Himself could not be a spirit, forasmuch as He had all the attributes and accidents of a body. "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." We can hardly think that our Lord would thus have given a criterion, as it were, for distinguishing a spirit or an apparition, were it indeed only the fable or fancy of the credulous, that the tenantry of the invisible world may occasionally be sent by God with messages to man, or that the grave may, to all appearance, give back its inhabitants for the disclosure of foul deeds, or the warning of the living.

Of this only may we be persuaded, that it would not be on any trivial or ordinary occasion that God drew the veil, and commissioned spiritual beings to appear upon earth. In some great crisis, whether to nations or to individuals, He might see fit to convey intimations through the agency of a spectre, employing supernatural machinery to give warning of a coming catastrophe, to prepare a people for battle, or a sinner for dissolution. The rich man, whilst he tossed on the fires of hell, imagined that if the dead Lazarus were permitted to revisit the earth, and to appear amongst his brethren in the midst of their carelessness and revelry, the effect would be to stir them to repentance, and so prevent their joining him in his place of deep torment. And therefore did He passionately beseech that the apparition might be sent, and that the beggar might stand before his dissolute kinsmen in the startling form of one risen from the grave. The request was denied: but it was not denied on the principle that the case was not one for supernatural interference, but on the reason that they, who could resist the teaching of Moses and the prophets, would remain unpersuaded by the warnings of a spirit.

It was the sort of case in which we

might look for the apparition, so far as its importance was concerned. But it is not God's method, to employ extraordinary means, when ordinary ought to have sufficed; and, therefore, they who yield not to the ministrations of the Gospel, and are not warned by daily judgments and occurrences, must not think to have the silences of the midnight broken by a mysterious voice, nor the solitude of the chamber invaded by a boding spectre, in order to their being compelled to give heed to religion. It is not that there might not be wrought, in many instances, a beneficial and permanent effect on the careless and impenitent, through the medium of an apparition. For though in the parable, to which we have referred, it is stated that they, who heard not Moses and the prophets, would not "be persuaded though one rose from the dead;" this can only be understood of such as have listened to Moses and the prophets, and remained unconvinced: there is yet a vast number, even in a land flooded with the light of revelation, who can hardly be said to be cognizant of the Gospel; and, very possibly, upon these the spectral messenger would produce great effect; though, forasmuch as their ignorance of the Gospel may be traced to their own negligence and wilfulness, it is not to be expected, that, on their behalf, shall graves be depopulated, and wild unearthly phantoms make the night terrible.

Still the general proposition remains, that, if ever the veil which God hath hung between the visible and the invisible world be withdrawn, so that, in shape and bearing discernible by man, a spirit cross the separating line, it must be on some great and mighty occasion, when an awful truth is to be delivered, or a dread event foretold. And if any thing can give solemnity to a message, any thing persuade us of its being the announcement of something deep and momentous, it must be its being breathed from spectral lips; or that, in agreement with the thrilling words which the ghost of Samuel used to Saul in the cave of the enchantress, one of the dead hath been disquieted that he might bring the communication. Come then, we again say, it must be a vast and startling truth which we have to lay before you: it would not otherwise have been con-

veyed through the ministry of a spectre : there would not otherwise have been need of an express revelation, and that, too, by the voice of a flitting figure, whose pale and shadowy form caused the hair of the spectator's flesh to stand up. If there be deep words in Scripture, or words to which we require extraordinary testimony, surely they must be those, which, in departure from all common course, God sent a spirit to utter—and thus it was that these questions were breathed, "Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker?"

And here we bring you to the point which appears to us to require the being closely examined. It is very certain, that, on reading the account of the apparition which stood before Eliphaz—an apparition so mysteriously terrible, that he declares, in the verse preceding our text, "Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake"—we naturally prepare ourselves for some very momentous communication, for a truth which lay beyond the reach of reason, or which was likely to have remained undiscovered, had not God thus strangely interposed, and conveyed it through an extraordinary channel. All that can be said as to the mode of revelation in early, or patriarchal, days, when visions were employed because as yet the Divine purposes were not laid open to the world, only confirms the expectation that it would be some truth of overwhelming interest, scarcely to be detected by the researches of natural theology, with whose delivery a spirit came charged.

But the question now is, whether such an expectation be, in any measure, answered; whether, in other words, there be any thing of apparent keeping between the message itself, and the supernatural machinery employed to give it utterance. We do not think that, at first sight, there is. Surely, if there be an elementary truth, a truth, at least, which every one who believes in the existence of a God may ascertain without revelation, and must admit without questioning, it is, that man cannot be more just than God, nor more pure than his Maker. You might exclaim, We need no angel from heaven to teach us this : this follows immediately on the confession of a God : in no age of the world

can it have been necessary to teach those, who believed in a God, that God must be better and greater than themselves ; theoretically, at least, they must always have held this proposition, and could not have required the being confirmed in it through a supernatural visitation.

And however scanty may have been the amount of express revelation in the days of the Patriarch Job, there is no debate that a pure theism was the creed of himself and his friends : that they must have been as well aware as ourselves, and as ready to acknowledge, that there existed a Being to whom every other was tributary and inferior, and whose perfections were further removed than is heaven from earth, from whatsoever may be likened to them in human characteristics. We cannot well doubt, that, had Eliphaz been asked, before the mysterious visitant came upon him in the midnight, which he believed the more just, and which the more pure, man or his Maker, he would have answered without hesitation, that there could not be comparison ; he would perhaps have expressed surprise, that any one could have supposed that the lofty Being who inhabiteth eternity, might be rivalled in any excellence by the creatures of a day.

But what then are we to gather from the visit of the spectre ? wherefore was there this departure from ordinary rules, this sending of a special messenger from the invisible world, if nothing were communicated that was not already well known, nothing but the most elementary truth, which, even in the greatest dearth of revelation, must have been accessible to all who, possessing any mind, employed it upon Deity ? We readily own that there is a great apparent discrepancy between the employed instrumentality and the communicated message. We should have quite expected that the apparition would have announced some abstruse, mysterious proposition ; that, as it was sent for the purpose of affording instruction, its utterances would not have been limited to an ascertained and incontestable fact. If there had been any thing that could strictly have been called a revelation ; if some property of Godhead had been made known, which was not discoverable by reason ; or if some intimation had

been granted of the wondrous scheme of rescue which in the fulness of time was to be acted out on the earth, there would seem to us a sufficient end for the appearance of the spirit, or a keeping between the purpose and the agency. But to send a spectre, to send it with every terrible accompaniment, so that it seems to have chilled the blood and palsied the tongue of the spectator, and to give it nothing to say, but that God is juster and purer than man—there does indeed appear here a kind of incongruity; and we are bound to examine whether there be not some lesson conveyed in the very circumstance of the employment of a vision, when, according to our apprehensions, there was no need of supernatural teaching. And forasmuch as we know assuredly that the means which God employs are always the best, precisely adapted, and never disproportioned, to the end, it must rather become us to conclude that the truth, which the apparition delivered, is not so universally admitted as we suppose, than to wonder that what every one acknowledges should have received so marvellous an attestation.

It is here that we come upon the chief instructiveness of the passage. We wish you indeed to contrast the solemnity and awfulness of the agency employed with the simplicity and commonness of the message delivered. But we do not mean you to infer that the agency was disproportioned to the message: we rather call upon you to examine whether, notwithstanding the ready confession, the message be not one in regard of which there is a secret infidelity; whether, in short, there be not often needed some such instrumentality as that of the spectre, to persuade even ourselves that mortal man is neither more just, nor more pure than his Maker.

We may suppose that Eliphaz adduced the vision as applicable to the circumstances of Job, who laboring under most weighty affliction, would be tempted to arraign the equity of the Divine dispensations. It would not have been surprising, in a measure it would seem to have been the case, had Job compared the righteousness of his life with the severity of his lot, and had he drawn from the comparison conclusions unfavorable to the moral government of God. Indeed, they who had

known the purity of the patriarch, and then observed the fearful judgments by which he was overtaken, must have had need of strong faith to repress injurious suspicions, and to justify to themselves the ways of their Maker. Yea, so difficult was it to do this, without falling into an opposite error, that the three friends of Job could only defend God by accusing the patriarch; they vindicated the judgments which were visible, by supposing some wickedness which had not been detected. Accordingly, Eliphaz quoted what he had heard from the apparition, as though to repress what was struggling in the breast of the sufferer, or to assure all, who might be staggered by his calamities, that God must be clear in the matter, whatever might be said as to man. It was as much as to say, appearances are perplexing: judging from these alone, we might decide against the Divine equity, and suppose that even human beings would act with greater justice. But I can tell you of an express communication from Heaven, intended to fortify against such injurious suspicions: there stood before me a messenger from the invisible world, and in accents which thrilled through the soul he denounced the imagining that, under any possible circumstances, man can be juster and more pure than God.

Thus the vision was probably granted, and certainly used, to oppose an infidelity more or less secret—an infidelity which, fostered by the troubles and discrepancies of human estate, took the Divine attributes as its subject, and either limited or denied them altogether. And what say you, men and brethren, as to there being no such infidelity amongst ourselves? We are persuaded, that, if you will search your own hearts, you will find that you often give it some measure of entertainment. We are persuaded of this in regard both of God's general dealings, and of his individual or personal.

And, first, of God's general dealings, of those of which the whole race, as a body, is the subject. In spite of all the demonstrations of theology—nay, in spite of all the acknowledgments and confessions of men, when pressed for an answer—there is harbored a suspicion, if not a persuasion, that God acted in a manner unworthy of his perfections,

when He suffered Adam to fall, and entailed a heritage of woe on myriads which had no share in his transgression. There is so much of mystery round the permission of evil; it is apparently so strange, that, for a single fault, calamity and death should have been made the portion of successive and mighty generations; that, reason how we will, and prove what we will, numbers secretly cherish the thought that there was injustice with God, or, if not injustice, a defective benevolence.

We are not afraid of putting it to your own consciences to attest the truth of this. We are sure that many amongst you will secretly acknowledge, that, when they look on a world overrun with sorrow, and, yet more, when they think on the fire and the worm which must constitute the future portion of those who obey the evil passions roused in them through the apostasy of Adam, they feel as though there were something harsh and inexplicable in the dispensation, something not to have been expected from such a being as God, but more or less at variance with the presumed attributes of his nature. And we are not now about to expose the thorough falseness of the opinion. We have often done this. We have often shown you, that, forasmuch as God had all along determined the redemption of man, it consisted as much with goodness as with justice that He permitted his fall—there having been provision, in the mediatorial arrangement, for the bestowment of far greater happiness on the race than it lost through the original sin.

But it is not our present business to vindicate the equity of the dealings in question: we have simply to do with the suitability of sending an apparition, when that equity might be the burden of the message which it bore. The point which lies for our inquiry, is merely, whether such a supernatural agency as was employed towards Eliphaz be, or be not, disproportioned to the communication with which the spectre was charged. And our belief is, that there is no disproportion; that, even now, with all the aids which revelation can supply, and with the glorious things of redemption thrown open to our view, there is frequently harbored a feeling that God's ways were not

worthy of Himself, when He exposed our first parents to temptation, and, having suspended on a single act the interests of countless myriads, interfered not to prevent the universal shipwreck. We care not whether the feeling be openly avouched, though that is far from rare—enough that it is secretly cherished; and so long as any man, viewing the condition of the world, and tracing that condition to its cause, is disposed to accuse God of a want, whether of equity or of benevolence, in regard of his first dealings with our race, so long may it be said that an apparition would be suitably employed, if employed to deliver only such words as those which the affrighted Eliphaz heard. I know that you would expect, and very justly, that, if the silence of the midnight is to be broken by an unearthly voice, it must be for the announcement of some very great truth; that, if you are to be startled by a boding form, gliding to the bedside, it must be on some extraordinary occasion, and for some momentous purpose. But we should find such an occasion, and such a purpose, wheresoever there was a disposition to arraign God's dealings with mankind, to doubt, if not to deny, their thorough consistence with the alleged attributes of his nature. It is nothing to say that there is already sufficient information, if there be still a secret and lingering infidelity. The sufficiency of the information may be a reason against expecting a supernatural visit; but the fact of the infidelity is proof of what would be the suitability of the visit. And though I know of any one of you, that he has in his hands the Bible, that amazing register of God's gracious purposes and arrangements on behalf of the fallen and lost, and that he attends the ministrations of the Gospel, through which is laid before him a scheme of restoration far more than commensurate with the ruin wrought by sin, yet I should not be surprised, I should not, that is, feel as though there were an agency disproportioned to the need, were I to hear of this man, that he had been visited by such a form as that which stood before Eliphaz, and, nevertheless, that this form had uttered only the questions which Eliphaz heard. I know too well how possible, how common, it is for men to be staggered by

the permission of evil, notwithstanding what is revealed to them as to the final prevalence of good. I know too well what secret misgivings there are, what questionings, what doubtings, what suspicions: and with what a distressed and apprehensive look many survey the aboundings both of iniquity and of misery, as though they feared that on so troubled a sea there could not sit majestic the righteousness of the Lord. And could I then think that an apparition had been commissioned for a necessarily insufficient end, if commissioned only to declare the pre-eminent and immutable attributes of the Most High?

Not so: the means would, in no sense, be disproportioned to the end, and the end would be in every sense worthy of the means. It might be that the chamber, which the spectre invaded, was that of one whose mind had long been harassed by the common doubts, and who, despite the testimony of Scripture, was wont to argue upon human principles in respect of the fall, and to reach conclusions derogatory to the Divine perfections. There are thousands such in every division of Christendom—I doubt not there are some, whether few or many, amongst yourselves. Single me out such an individual. I dare not predict, that, at some coming midnight, the spectre will be at his side. I do not say that he has right to expect a supernatural visit, when the ordinary means of instruction are so ready to his hand, and so abundant in themselves. But this I say—that I should see nothing to wonder at, nothing to persuade me that God had used extraordinary agency where it was not required, if that individual came to me, and told me, with all the indications of one who still quailed at the remembrance, that, in some deep silence, and in some dark solitude, there had hovered before him an indistinct form, forcing itself to be felt as from the unseen world, by the creeping of the flesh, and the standing of the hair; that there had come forth from it a voice, such as never issued from human thing; and, nevertheless, that the only utterances thus syllabled in fearfulness and mystery, were these simple questions, “Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker?”

My brethren, will you be disposed to

say that we overstate facts, if we now turn from the general dealings of God to the individual, or personal, and contend that the main of our foregoing argument is applicable without the change of a letter? We have hitherto reasoned on a disposition towards questioning the equity of those dealings of which our whole race is the subject, as sprung of a rebellious ancestry. We have contended that such a disposition is common, notwithstanding the full testimonies of revelation, so that numbers cherish a secret infidelity, thinking man more just than God, inasmuch as man would not have permitted so ruinous a thing as our first parents' fall. And we have argued, that, so long as this secret infidelity exists, it would not be without sufficient cause that an apparition passed the boundary line between the visible and the invisible world, though it should have nothing to utter but elementary truth, like that heard by Eliphaz, truth quite discoverable by reason, though you keep out of sight the aids of revelation. But now let us ask you whether that very infidelity, which we have thus labored to expose, does not gain power over many, when individually subjected to trials and afflictions? Alas, how easy is it to confess that God doeth all things well, till his hand is on ourselves; and how common, then, to feel as though his dealings were strange, and hard to be justified. There is no more frequent expression than such as this, “What a mysterious Providence! what a dark dispensation!” You can scarcely speak to a Christian when in trouble, without hearing some such words. Whether it be the death of a child, or of a parent, the loss of property, or the frustration of some long-cherished plan, with which he has been visited, his tone is commonly that of one to whom something has happened which could not have been looked for, and who cannot account for the permission of the evil.

Now we do not mean to say that there are no such things as what are popularly termed mysterious providences; but we are sure that the name is frequently given where there is no mystery at all. The end for which God appoints, or, rather, permits affliction, is to turn men to Himself, if they be yet the impenitent, and to wean them more from the world, if they be already converted. It

can, therefore, in no case be actually surprising that affliction should come, because even the most righteous are so far from perfect, that, to their dying day, they will need corrective discipline. Where then, in strict truth, is the mysteriousness of a dispensation, if we can always see the designed advantageousness? There is something of contradiction here. The Christian tells me that the death of his child is a dark dealing—wherefore dark, if himself confesses that he is not yet refined, as he should be, from the dross of this earth, and, therefore, has further need of passing through the furnace? He may not be able to trace a connexion between the particular sorrow and some particular sin: he may not, that is, be able to assign any one special reason for any one special affliction—and so far there might be mystery, were it, indeed, his business to affix to every stripe an individual cause—but he can see clearly enough that he requires chastisement in the general; and how then can it be mysterious that chastisement should come?

And we cannot but feel, that, in a variety of instances, this speaking of the mysteriousness of a common dispensation, indicates a secret doubt as to the goodness or fitness of the dispensation: men would not be so ready to call a thing inexplicable, if, all the while, they felt that it was wisely and benevolently ordered. We do not mean to say that a Christian may not, at one and the same time, regard a dealing as mysterious, and feel it to be good: but where mysteriousness is ascribed to that for which there is evidently reason in abundance, we have ground to suspect that there is no real persuasion of there being such reason at all. And judge ye yourselves, ye to whom God has been pleased to allot much of sorrow, whether ye have not cherished a secret suspicion that ye were dealt with in a manner not to have been looked for from One who knew your frame, and remembered that ye were dust; whether ye have not used what ye have called the darkness of the dispensation, to cover a doubt, if not a denial, of its goodness?

We would have you call to mind your misgivings, when some beloved object has lain dead in your houses, or your rebellious questionings when trouble of

one kind or another has made way into your families; and you will hardly, we think, be able to deny, that, in seasons of affliction, there is a tendency, in the face of all the testimony of Scripture and experience, towards disbelieving the fundamental attributes of God, or regarding his dispensations as at variance with his perfections. Ah, if you want evidence that the apparition, in bringing the very simplest and most elementary of messages, brought what was worthy of a supernatural conveyance, you might often find that evidence in the chamber of some mourner who is weeping for the dead. It may be that yonder mother, as she looks on the rigid pale face of her child, imagines herself resigned, and professes her persuasion that God hath smitten her in love. But doubts are struggling in her mind; the affliction seems to her inexplicable: she cannot understand why she should have been thus visited: the Bible, indeed, assures her of the compassion, the tenderness, of the Almighty; but she turns from comforting texts to the sad spectacle before her—so young, so beautiful, so gentle, would not a merciful being have spared awhile that sweet flower?—and then the tears, which the light of revelation had almost dried, break forth again, and, though taken for the gushings of nature, are rather the flowings of unbelief.

Now is it not certain that this distracted and sorrowing parent requires to have impressed upon her the most elementary of truths, that God cannot do wrong, that He cannot do other than the best? Whatever her theory, it is practically this truth of which she wants persuasion; it is this truth in which she has no thorough belief. And if, then, it were to please God to vouchsafe her a supernatural communication, would it not be worthy of God, would not the supernatural machinery be fitly employed, if the message were nothing more than that sent to Eliphaz? She has the Bible: she has the revelation of the Gospel: but, notwithstanding these, she is secretly distrustful of God, and inclined to arraign the goodness of his dealings. Then I do not know, that, as she sits there, and wails over the dead, a shadowy thing will pass before her, and bring words from above. But this I know—that, if an apparition were to

enter, and stand, in its unearthliness, at the side of the coffin where her child lies so still, the most appropriate message which the spectre could deliver, would be the simple one which was brought so thrillingly to Eliphaz. Ay, that mother might rush from her chamber with the scared and wan look of one who had gazed on the being of another sphere; and she might relate to me, circumstantially and convincingly, how, in the darkened room, and amid that silence which is the more oppressive because it makes every sob so distinct, she had been confronted by a form whose very mystery proved it an inhabitant of the invisible world. But when she had collected herself sufficiently to tell me what the spectre had said, I should expect to hear nothing of new revelation, nothing as to the state of the departed, nothing as to the happiness of heaven. I should expect, as most precisely what she needed, and therefore as most likely to be thus strangely transmitted, that the apparition, which had made the hair of her flesh stand up, would have left these words printed on her mind, "Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker?"

And thus we may, perhaps, have done something towards removing the appearance of disproportion between the vehicle employed and the message conveyed—the vehicle supernatural, the message the most simple, and apparently not needing the being delivered at all. I do not know whether you may have been used to observe the disproportion; but, certainly, to my own mind it is very striking. I almost tremble at the description which Eliphaz gives of the spirit. I feel sure that this dim and awful visitant must have come for a momentous and extraordinary purpose. I prepare myself, accordingly, to hear from his lips some deep, majestic, and perhaps inscrutable, truth—when, lo, there is nothing uttered but what every child knows, what every one believes, in believing a God. Our great object has been to show you, that, simple as the truth is, and unhesitatingly acknowledged, it is nevertheless one in regard of which there is a prevalent, though secret unbelief, so that an apparition would not be employed on what did not

need the being supernaturally taught, if employed to enforce so elementary a proposition.

And there is one general inference which we wish to draw from the apparent, though not actual disproportion. It is this—that truths, which we never think of disputing, may be those which practically we are most in the habit of forgetting. It is of well-known things that a spectre must speak to us, if it would speak of what it is important that we know. The apparition is not needed to impart new truth, but to impress old. O strange but actual condition of man—that, if a spirit were sent to him with a message for his good, it would be only of things with which he has long been familiar. The apparition enters the chamber of the man of pleasure—what says it to the terrified voluptuary? "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass." Why, he knew this before; he has heard it a thousand times—yes; but this is what he practically disbelieves: he lives as though he were not to die, and, therefore, what he needs from the apparition is the being told his mortality. The gliding spectre goes stealthily to the side of a miser; as the wealthy accumulator cowers and quails before the phantom, in what words is he addressed? "We brought nothing into the world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out;"—why, this is no news: must the sheeted dead come back to tell a man this? no news, indeed—yet this is what the covetous practically disbelieves; he hoards as though his riches were to go with him into eternity; and therefore would the apparition be employed to the most necessary end, if employed to give impressiveness to the very tritest of truths.

It is the same in every other instance. With every one of us there is some simple truth about which there is no dispute, but to which there is no power; and if a spectre were sent with a message, it would be this truth which it would be most for our advantage that it should deliver; the delivery being needed, not to increase our knowledge, but to make the knowledge influential. Alas! alas! is not this true in regard of all the uncontroverted in the present assembly? Spirits of the dead, appear amongst us. Rise as shadowy, vapory

things, and preach, in the name of the living God, to the men and the women who yet care nothing for their souls. What will they say? "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Why, I have preached this to you a hundred times: ye have heard it, till ye are wearied by the repetition. And yet, if we want spectres at all, we want them only to deliver this common-place truth: it might be effectual, as breathed by their wild strange voices, though often uttered without avail by mine.

So that, it is not to tell you what is new, but to make you feel what is old, that we would invoke the phantoms, and beseech them to arise. But they come not—why should they? ye must be self-condemned, if your remaining in danger of everlasting death be only through your not acting on your knowledge. It is not a revelation which you need: and therefore must you not ex-

pect that God will depart from ordinary rules, and send ærial beings to make revelation more impressive. The spirits will not appear now, to force you to accept what you make light of when offered through the ministrations of your fellow men. But the spirits shall appear hereafter. "Ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" shall be around the Judge. They shall attest the equity of the sentence which dooms to destruction those who have put from them pardon through Christ. I hear the words that were heard by Eliphaz—if, for a moment, those appointed to the fire and the shame attempt to arraign the justice of their portion, a voice like the voice of many thunderings, or of mighty waters, bursts from the throng, the countless throng, of spirits, "Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall man be more pure than his Maker?"

SERMON V.

VARIOUS OPINIONS.

"Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the Scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?"—*St. JOHN* vii. 40, 41, 42.

We often speak of the great changes and revolutions which have occurred in the world: history is considered as little else than the record of the rise and fall of communities, families, and individuals. But, throughout the long series of vicissitudes, there may be traced much of what is permanent and perpetual; so that, probably, sameness or uniformity is as truly the characteristic of human history as variety or diversity. It may, for example, be always ascertained by a careful observer, that the same

principles have pervaded God's moral government: amid all changes and chances, it can be seen that an overruling providence has been at work, guiding the complicated instrumentality, and directing it to the futherance of certain fixed purposes and ends. It may also be perceived that the elements of human character have throughout been the same: man has changed in his fortune and position, but not in himself: you find him in the most opposite conditions, according as civilization is advanced or

defective, according as power is bestowed or withheld; but you never find him other than a creature inclined to evil, and not liking to "retain God in his thoughts."

This sameness in human character might be traced in the minutest particulars. Not but what there are many and marked differences between the savage, and the man of a polished age and community; but they are not differences in the staple, so to speak, of the moral constitution; you might in any given case make the one out of the other, and still have the same enmity to God and to righteousness, because you would still have the same depraved heart. And forasmuch as the human heart, in its unrenewed state, has all along been the same, answering always to the scriptural description, "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," there can be no surprise that so great sameness may be traced in man himself, notwithstanding the perpetual shiftings of his condition: you can expect nothing but that, when viewed as the creature of God, he should exhibit the same prejudice, opposition, and dislike; make similar objections to the divine dealings, and justify unbelief by similar fallacies.

It were beside our purpose to go into evidence, on the present occasion, of the moral, or religious sameness, which may be traced, we affirm, throughout the history of man. But our text, relating, as it does, opinions and debates of the Jews with regard to our Lord, will give us great opportunities of observing this sameness in some particular cases. We shall probably find that the sort of reasoning, by which the claims of Christianity were parried at its first introduction, is still practised amongst ourselves: we may be compelled to say that men are what they were more than eighteen hundred years back, on discovering that the grounds of scepticism are but little shifted; that modern indifference, or unbelief, borrows from ancient its form and apology.

Leaving this, however, to open upon us as we advance with our subject—or rather, preparing you by it to expect that we shall turn much of our discourse on resemblances between the Jews and ourselves—we will go straightway to the scene presented by the text: we will hearken to the various and conflicting

sentiments which are being expressed in regard of our Redeemer; and we will see whether we may not find matter of instruction and warning, as some call Him the Prophet, some the Christ, whilst others are asking, whether it be not indeed contrary to Scripture, that the Christ should come out of Galilee?

Now the first parties introduced into our text, are those who were disposed to recognize in our Lord a teacher sent from God: for though it is not quite clear whom they intended by "the Prophet"—whether Him of whom Moses had spoken, "a Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me," and who was none other than Messiah Himself; or whether that Prophet who was generally expected as the forerunner of the Messiah—there can be no question that they meant some one with a commission from above, some instructor, authorised by God to deliver intimations of his purpose and will. Probably, indeed, they who call our Lord "the Prophet," did not thereby mean the Christ; for the Evangelist makes two classes, those who confessed "the Prophet" in our Savior, and those who confessed the Christ; and this he would hardly have done, had the same personage been intended, but under different names. In either case, however,—and this is all with which we are at present concerned—a teacher with divine authority was evidently recognized: something had been done, or said, by our Lord, which produced a conviction—though it may have been only transient, and without practical results—that He was no deceiver, no enthusiast; but that He spake in God's name, and bore his commission.

And it will be very interesting to observe what had been the immediate producing cause of this conviction; for we so generally find our Lord treated with contempt and neglect, his miracles being ascribed to Beelzebub, and his discourses listened to with apparent indifference, that we naturally look for something very memorable in the doing or the saying, which could influence the multitude to regard with favor his claims.

It was not, as you learn from the first verse of our text, any action of Christ which wrought this effect: He had not just then been working one of his more

stupendous miracles; though this, you may think, would most readily have explained the sudden conviction of his being Messiah. The effect is expressly attributed to a "saying" of our Lord. "Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet." And what was the wonder-working saying? Those of you who do not remember, will be apt to imagine that the saying must have been one of extraordinary power, some mighty assertion of divinity, or, perhaps, some verification in himself of ancient prophecy, too complete and striking to be resisted, even by Jewish unbelief. Certainly were it put to us to conjecture a saying by which Christ was likely to have overcome for a time the general infidelity, it would be natural for us to fix on some sublime and magnificent announcement, some application of Scripture, or some declaration of supremacy, which carried with it startling evidence of unearthly authority. And we are far from wishing to imply that the actual saying of our Lord was not of the kind which would be thus readily supposed; but at first sight, at least, it scarcely seems such as might have naturally been expected. You find the saying in the thirty-seventh verse of the chapter. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." This was the wonder-working saying. Our Lord indeed proceeded, in the following verse, to bear out, as it were, the saying by a quotation from ancient Scripture, "He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." But it is evident enough that this is only given in illustration, or vindication of the saying; so that still the saying, on which many of the people yielded, was the simple invitation in the thirty-seventh verse.

And it ought not to be overlooked, that, before the Evangelist describes the effect of the saying on the people, he introduces, in a parenthesis, a comment on the saying. It is very unusual with the sacred writers to affix any explanation of the meaning of our Lord; but this is one of the rare cases in which a commentary is subjoined; for St. John adds, "But this spake he of the Spirit which they that believe on him should

receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." This is very observable, because, by adding an explanation of the saying, the Evangelist would seem to imply that it was, in a measure, difficult or obscure: nevertheless, it wrought with surprising energy on a great mass of hearers: simple as it seems to us, dark as, in some respects, it must have been counted by St. John, it succeeded at once, if not in permanently attaching numbers to Christ's side, yet in wringing from them a confession that He could be none other than a divinely sent teacher. Here, then, we have a point of very great interest to examine. Let us separate it from the remainder of the text, and set ourselves simply to consider what there was in the saying which our Lord had uttered, to induce many of the people to exclaim, "Of a truth this is the Prophet, and others, This is the Christ."

Now you will observe at once, that the saying before us is one of those gracious invitations, into which may be said to be gathered the whole Gospel of Christ. It demands, indeed, a sense of want, the feeling of thirst: but if there be this, it proffers an abundant supply. "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." And by adding a reference to Scriptures, which, though not then fully understood, could only be interpreted of some measure and kind of supernatural influence, our blessed Lord may be considered as intimating, that what He promised to the thirsty was a spiritual gift, the satisfying of desires after God and immortality. Whatever the degree in which the promise may have been understood, there can be no doubt that it was received as relating to communications of Divine grace, that it was thought, or felt, to convey assurance of instruction in the knowledge of God, and of assistance in the great business of saving the soul.

Here is the moral thirst, to which every one must have been conscious that our Lord had respect, and which is not to be slaked at the springs of human science, or of natural theology. And if there were many, as there may have been, in the throng surrounding Christ, on the last and great day of the feast, who, dissatisfied with the traditions of the elders, felt the need of higher teach-

ing in order to acquaintance with heavenly things, we may quite understand how the gracious promise of living waters would come home to them, as meeting their wants; and how the felt suitability of the offer would pass with them as an argument for the Divine mission of Him by whom it was made.

There is no difference here, according to our introductory remarks, between past days and our own: we have but to transfer the scene to ourselves, and the like invitation may produce the like effect. For the argument herein involved is, after all, but that on which we have often to touch, and which is based on what we call the self-evidencing power of the Bible, the power which there is in it, quite apart from outward credentials, of commending itself to the conscience as the word of the Almighty. You are all aware of the difference between the external and the internal evidence for the truth of Christianity. There is a vast mass of external evidence in miracles which have been wrought, and prophecies which have been accomplished. But there is also a vast mass of internal evidence, in the suitability of the revealed doctrines to man's ascertained wants, in the exactness with which the proposed remedy meets the known disease. One man may be convinced of the Divine mission of a teacher, by seeing him work wonders which surpass human power; another, by hearing him deliver truths which surpass human discovery. A religion may commend itself to me as having God for its author, either by prodigies wrought in its support, or by the nicety with which it fits in to the whole mental and moral constitution, to the complicated wants, and the restless cravings, of a soul which has sought in vain every where else for supply and direction.

And this latter is the standing witness for the Bible. The sinner who is conscious of exposure to the wrath of God, and of utter inability in himself to ward off destruction, will find in Christ so precisely the Savior whom he needs, and in the proffered aid of the Spirit so exactly the help adapted to his circumstances, that there will seem to him no room for doubt as to the truth of the Gospel: like parts of one and the same curious and intricate machine, the Bible, and the human conscience and heart, so

fit in to each other, that there must have been the same Author to all: it is felt, even where there is no external demonstration, that He who wrote the book, must have been He who made the man.

We do not, of course, mean that this self-evidencing power of Scripture will commend itself to all with the same readiness, and urgency, as might a visible miracle performed in its support. There is required a peculiar state of mind, in order to the appreciating the internal testimony: it springs mainly from the correspondence between the remedy and the disease, and cannot, therefore, be detected except where the disease has been felt. And you observe, accordingly, that the saying of our Lord, which is now under review, supposes a sense of deficiency, or a feeling of want: it invites only the thirsty: the thirsty alone will be inclined to hearken to it: but the thirsty will be attracted by its proffering exactly what they feel that they need. Thus with the everlasting Gospel. It proposes a Savior to lost sinners: they who feel themselves lost sinners will quickly discern in Christ such a Savior as they need: they who are altogether void of such a feeling will find in Him "no form, nor comeliness;" and if overcome by the external evidence for the truth of Christianity, will merely assent to it as to a barren speculation, a question of history, about which, even when professedly convinced, they remain practically indifferent.

There is probably enough in these remarks to explain why it should have been on the hearing a certain saying of our Lord, as is expressly noted by the Evangelist, that many of the people were disposed to own Him for the Christ. Do you wonder that such an effect should not rather have followed on the working of some miracle, than on the utterance of some saying? Nay—you are to observe that there is a state of mind, a state aptly delineated by the imagery of thirst, which is more accessible to an appropriate doctrine than to any outward demonstration: the thirsty man feels the suitability of a promise of water, and is at once disposed to close with the proffer, without waiting for signs that He who makes it has authority to deal with his case.

But, admitting that a doctrine may prevail where even a miracle has no

power, do you next wonder that the saying, which wrought with so great energy, should have been so simple and unpretending as it is? Nay—we set against this opinion the whole of what has been advanced as to the self-evidencing power of the Bible. I have right to assume that there were many in the crowd who thirsted; and Christ could not have spoken more immediately to the consciences and hearts of such as thirsted, than by inviting them to come to Him that they might drink. Who thirsts? the man who, feeling himself a sinner, pants for the forgiveness of his sins. The man who, conscious of inability, longs to be assisted in turning unto God. The man who, made aware of his immortality, craves endless happiness. The man who, taught that God is just, seeks eagerly to discover whether He can be also the justifier of the fallen. What will these thirsty ones listen to most readily? in what words will they be most disposed to recognize the voice and the authority of truth? Certainly, as no message will so much meet their need, none will so much commend itself to them as proceeding from God who best knows their wants, as that which shows how thirst may be satisfied, how the longing for forgiveness, for righteousness, for happiness, on the part of sinful creatures, may be appeased without violence, nay, rather, with honor, to Divine justice and purity.

And though Christ did not go into all these particulars, there was that in his saying which addressed itself to every case of spiritual thirst; which no thirsty man could fail to take to himself; so that you have only to suppose that many were thirsting in the crowd, and you suppose many to whom the invitation must have come home with the self-evidencing power which we claim for the Gospel. If there were not enough, in so brief and unexplained a saying, to prove that Christ came from God, there was enough to incline those, who were conscious of spiritual wants, to receive teaching from One who offered the very thing of which they were in quest. If the simple invitation were not likely, of itself, to convince such as had not heard of Him before of his being the Messiah, yet, when it came upon anxious and craving minds, which had already been moved by the fame of his

miracles, it was adapted to scatter all doubts, and to turn into full persuasion the growing conjecture. Miracles, of themselves, cannot prove a Divine mission: they must be wrought in defence of truth; otherwise we may not ascribe them to the finger of God. But He who, having worked miracles to fix attention on his doctrine, then proceeded to utter doctrine which was as water to the parched and wearied soul of man—oh, he indeed left no place for unbelief, save with those who were hewing out broken cisterns for themselves, or fancying that they could call up fountains of their own in the desert. And thus, if it could only have been in an imperfect degree that the self-evidencing power, which is now so energetic in Scripture, resided in the short saying to which these remarks have respect, you have only to bring into account the actual state of the multitude, as not unacquainted with the supernatural works performed by our Lord, and you have explanation enough why so great a disposition to acknowledge Him was called forth by what He uttered on the last day of the feast, why many of the people, when they heard that saying, said, "Of a truth, this is the Prophet, or this is the Christ."

But now let us mix again with the crowd, and hearken to some other of the opinions which are being passed to and fro in regard of our Saviour. There is nothing like uniformity of sentiment: they who are inclined to conclude that He can be none other than the long-promised Christ, find themselves met with objections, objections which are all the more formidable, because professing to ground themselves on Scripture. "But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee?" There is no attempt at invalidating the miracles, or depreciating the doctrines of our Lord; but there was a fatal argument, as these men urged, against his being the Messiah, an argument deduced from ancient prophecy, which had expressly fixed the birthplace and lineage of Christ. "Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?"

No doubt, Scripture had said this; and it would have been an insuperable objection to the claims of any one, professing himself the Messiah, that he had

not sprung of David's line, or not been born in Bethlehem. If our Lord had come out of Galilee, in the sense supposed by those who made the objection, it would be of no avail to multiply proofs of his having been the Christ: the evidence is against Him on one material point, and the defect is not to be counterbalanced by any amount of testimony on other particulars.

But this is really among the most surprising instances on record, of ignorance or inattention, if we may not go further, and accuse men of wilfully and unblushingly upholding what they knew to be false. It is hardly possible to imagine a matter of fact that might have been more readily ascertained, than that our Lord had been born at Bethlehem, and that his mother and reputed father were of the lineage of David. For the massacre of the innocents, by the cruel order of the tyrannical Herod, had made his birth so conspicuous, that it almost passes charity, that any could have been ignorant that He had not sprung from Galilee. At all events, when his parentage and birthplace were associated with so bloody a tragedy, a tragedy which could not yet have faded from the popular mind, the very slightest inquiry would have sufficed to correct so gross a misapprehension. It has always seemed as if God, in his over-ruling Providence, made the fury of Herod subserve the cause of the Gospel; for there was no one left but our Lord, who could prove Himself to have been born in Bethlehem on the expiration of Daniel's weeks of years: all others, born about that time, had perished by the sword; and, therefore, either He were the Messiah, or prophecy had failed.

So that—to say the very least—had men taken the smallest possible trouble, they might have known that our Lord was no Galilean in such sense as impeached the fulfilment of prophecy; but that, on the contrary, He had all that evidence on his side which could be drawn from parentage and birthplace. They might have fixed on other predictions in regard of the Messiah, the accomplishment of which in the person of our Lord was not of such clear and easy demonstration. But the predictions which had to do with his nativity, were just those on which we should have fastened, as intelligible to all in their

meaning, and accessible to all in their fulfilment. Yet so great was the popular indifference, or so strong the popular prejudice, that a statement seems to have gone uncontradicted through the land, that the pretended Messiah was by birth a Galilean: He passed by the name of "Jesus of Nazareth;" and this went in proof that He was not born in Bethlehem. Ay, and it may even be gathered from our text, that men were so glad of some specious excuse for rejecting our Lord, that, when his works, or his sayings, had almost constrained their belief and adherence, they caught eagerly at the shallow falsehood, and made it, without farther evidence, a pretext for continued opposition. It does not seem that when they who said, "This is the Prophet," or, "This is the Christ," found themselves met by the objection, "Shall Christ come out of Galilee," they had any reply to make: the impression from the narrative is—especially if you couple it with the known fact that very few of the people joined themselves to our Lord—that they considered the objection decisive; that they were ignorant of the facts of the case, and took no pains to inform themselves better. Indeed, we know not what fairer interpretation to put upon the circumstance, than that the eagerness to disprove the pretensions of Jesus made men seize, without examination, on any popular mistake which seemed to justify unbelief, and then avoid the finding out the mistake, because they could not spare so convenient an argument. However numbers, such as are described in the text, may have been at times half disposed to acknowledge the Christ, the secret wish of their hearts, as is clear from the result, must all along have been to the getting rid of so strict and uncompromising a teacher; and all they wanted was something of a specious pretence which might reconcile to their conscience what their inclinations prescribed. And it would be quite a treasure to these waverers, to meet with what might pass for a scriptural objection; it was like taking holy ground: it was making rejection a positive duty: it left them at liberty to admit the miracles, and admire the doctrines, but, alas! this remarkable Personage did not answer to certain tests laid down by the Prophets, and there was no alternative to

the refusing to receive Him as the promised Redeemer.

And when they once had hold of the scriptural objection, they would be at no pains to examine it carefully: there would be danger in this; and, busied as they were with a thousand other necessary things, they might well be permitted to take for granted what could hardly have been alleged, except it had been truth—Jesus universally passed for a Galilean, and mistake was insupportable in regard of a fact so easily ascertained. O the deceitfulness of the heart! what force it will find in an argument which sides with its wishes, what fallacy in another which opposes them! Think you that we exaggerate what was done by the Jews? Nay, we shall presently have to show you that they are not without their copyists even amongst ourselves. But, at present, put, if you can, any milder interpretation on the registered facts. God might be said to have inscribed the nativity of our Lord on the walls of Bethlehem, in the blood of its slaughtered infants. The nativity, which produced such a tragedy, could not have been difficult to ascertain, could have required no labored research into national archives, or family genealogies. Any man then, who knew that prophecy had fixed Bethlehem as the place of Messiah's birth, might equally have known, had he thought it worth while to inquire, that there had He been born who was called Jesus of Nazareth. But men had an interest in remaining deceived; their wish was not that of ascertaining truth, but rather that of finding a specious apology for adhering to falsehood. There is such a thing as shrinking from inquiry, through a secret dread of finding oneself in the wrong. A man may abstain from asking a question, because self-conscious that the answer might oblige him to change an opinion which he would rather not give up.

And this is what, from the evidence before us, we charge upon the Jews. Oh, it looked very fine to have Scripture on their side; the devil had used the Bible in tempting our Lord, and they could now use it in justifying their unbelief. But "the sword of the Spirit," like every other sword, may be used for suicide as well as for war. And if ever so used, it was in this instance. A fact

had been predicted, and in characters of blood had history registered the prediction's fulfilment. Yet was the prediction, which, for the trouble of asking, would have powerfully upheld our Lord's claims, turned, on the credit of an idle report, into a reason for their utter rejection. And men, who were just on the point of yielding to our Lord, overcome whether by the majesty of his miracles, or the sweetness of his discourses, turned away from Him, and sealed their own destruction, because they had no answer at hand, or took for granted that none could be given, to an objection which rested on a falsehood, and the falsehood one which a breath might have scattered, "Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the Scripture saith that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?"

And now, to recur to our introductory remarks, which asserted a sameness in human depravity and conduct, think ye that the like to this is not of frequent occurrence amongst ourselves? that the Jews have no successors in that readiness to disbelieve, which will seize on any straw for an argument, and actually be at pains to keep out of the way of any opposite evidence? Nay, it is done every day; we need not search far to be in possession of instances.

What is that scepticism which is often met with amongst the boastful and young, that sickly infidelity, which it were almost pity to attack with vehemence, so manifestly unprepared is it for vigorous defence? Is it the result of deep reading, or careful investigation? nothing of the kind. The fashionable young man, the student at a hospital, the orator at some juvenile literary club, gets hold of some objection against Christianity, which has a specious sound, and a formidable look—all the better, if it come out of the Bible itself, in the shape of an alleged contradiction, or an erroneous assertion; and this is enough for him; he has his "Shall Christ come out of Galilee?" and with one so decisive an argument, why should he trouble himself to search for any more? Oh, no—you are quite right; one sound argument is as good as a host: I did not blame the Jews for determining that Jesus could not be the Christ, if He had come out of Galilee; no amount of

evidence upon other points could have outweighed this simple testimony against Him.

But the aspiring sceptic will not be at the pains of inquiring into the strength of his objection. He will not refer to books, and, much less, to men better informed than himself, in order to know whether the objection have not been at least a hundred times refuted—and this is our quarrel with him. He wishes to continue deceived: it would be very distasteful to him to find himself in the wrong, and, therefore, he would rather avoid than seek the means of instruction. We are bold to say of all the popular arguments against the Bible, especially of those drawn from the Bible itself, that they have been so often refuted, their weakness and worthlessness so often exposed, that only overbearing effrontery, or unpardonable ignorance, will venture on repeating what is so worn out and stale. It were really, if I may use the expression, almost a refreshment, to meet with something a little new in sceptical objections. But it is the same thing again and again—"Shall Christ come out of Galilee?" and the sceptic, like the Jew, has really only to look round him, to ask a question, or consult a book, and he would find that Jesus did not come out of Galilee, but "out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was." God suffered infants to be slain, that the Jewish unbelief might be inexcusable; and He has raised up giants in his Church, whose writings will ever be a rampart to the Bible, that modern unbelief might be alike inexcusable. As easily may any one of you who has met with an objection to Christianity meet with its refutation, as might the Jews, hearing that Jesus was of Nazareth, have learned that He was actually of Bethlehem. But, alas! it is with the young and conceited, as it was with the Jews—there is a secret wish to be rid of Christianity; and it is safer not to make too close inquiry, lest it should only do away with a convenient excuse.

And we do not give this case of the youthful would-be sceptic, as the solitary exemplification of "Shall Christ come out of Galilee?" How fond are men of getting hold of some one text of Scripture, and shielding themselves under it from all the rest of the Bible! Who

has not heard, "Be not righteous overmuch," quoted, as though it excused a man from endeavouring to be righteous at all? And "charity shall cover a multitude of sins," is a most convenient passage: there is needed only a little misinterpretation, and a careful overlooking of all other Scripture, and a man may satisfy himself, that, by a little liberality to the poor, he shall hide his misdoings, or obtain their forgiveness. Every such fastening on any single text, without taking pains to examine and consider whether there be not some great and fundamental mistake, is but the repetition of what was done by the Jews; the Bible has said that Christ must come out of Bethlehem; and men are glad enough, without any inquiry, to reject a Gospel whose Author is reputed to have come out of Nazareth.

Shall we give you other instances? If a man wish to depreciate baptism, or the fitness that He who administers so holy an ordinance should have a commission from God, he has his text, his "Shall Christ come out of Galilee?" St. Paul said to the Corinthians "I thank God that I baptized none of you save Crispus and Gaius. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel." Then St. Paul made but little of baptism, and thought that the administering it fell beneath his high office! Did he indeed? why, this is worse than the Jews: they had to travel perhaps as far as to Bethlehem, to ascertain their mistake, but you need not go beyond the next verse to that which you quote, "Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name." Paul was thankful that he had baptized but few; for he judged, from the temper of the Corinthian Church, that, had he baptized many, it would only have encouraged that party-spirit which was so utterly at variance with vital Christianity. And this is making light of Baptism, or entitling any one to administer it! Alas, it seems of very little worth that Jesus was actually born at Bethlehem, since his ordinary name is "Jesus of Nazareth."

To take but one instance more. What numbers declaim against an Established Church! how persuaded are they that it is utterly unlawful for the civil power to meddle with religion, to take direct measures for the upholding Christianity,

in place of leaving it to that purest and most active instrumentality, "the voluntary principle." You may be sure that these declaimers have their text: they have their question, "Shall Christ come out of Galilee," out of acts of parliament, and compulsory payments? Hath He not said, "My kingdom is not of this world?" O the triumphant tone with which these words are uttered, the complacency with which they are considered as settling the controversy, and disgracing endowments! But have the words any thing to do with the matter? in what sense did Christ mean that his kingdom was not of this world? Nay, Bethlehem is not farther, in this case, from Galilee, than in that last adduced. They are both in one verse. "My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews." So then, the sense, as here defined, in which Christ's kingdom is not of this world, is simply that the sword is not to be used in its defence. "If my kingdom were of this world," my servants would fight like other soldiers; but it forbids persecution and war; so that it is "not of this world," in the sense of allowing, or depending on martial force or resistance. What has this to do with Church Establishments? Alas! this text, which is noised from one end of the land to the other, is, for all the world, the same in the hands of its perverters, as "Hath not the Scripture said that Christ cometh out of Bethlehem?" in the hands of the Jews. Because Christ was of Nazareth, as having lived there much, He could not have been born in Bethlehem:

because his kingdom is not of this world, as not permitting the slaughter of its enemies, it cannot lawfully be fostered by states which are its friends.

But we have no further space for multiplying instances. We have thrown out a subject for thought; and if you will consider for yourselves, you will easily find additional illustrations. It is no uncommon thing—this is our position—for men to seize on some one verse or declaration of the Bible, and to make it their excuse for clinging to a false theory, or neglecting a plain duty. Not that in any case the verse, justly interpreted and applied, will bear them out—no more than the prophecy as to Bethlehem warranted the Jews in rejecting Jesus of Nazareth. But there may be an appearance of reason, something plausible and specious; and error can never be more dangerous than when it seems to have Scripture on its side. The grand point then is, that you be on your guard against arguing from bits of the Bible, in place of studying the whole, and comparing its several parts. "No prophecy of the Scripture," and, in like manner, no portion of the Scripture, "is of any private interpretation." Settle the meaning fairly, by searching, with prayer for God's Spirit, into the relation which each statement bears to others, and by examining the light which it derives from them. The meaning, thus ascertained, shall never, no, never be contradicted by facts; if it be clear from the Bible that the Christ must be born in Bethlehem, it shall be always be found, on examining, that our Lord was not born in Nazareth.

SERMON VI.

THE MISREPRESENTATIONS OF EVE.

"And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."—GENESIS iii. 2, 3.

Whatever may have been the change which passed over man in consequence of sin, we are not to doubt that we retain, in great measure, the same constitution, weakened indeed and deranged, but compounded of the same elements, and possessing similar powers and tendencies. There does not appear to have been any essential difference between the mode in which Satan tempted Eve, and that wherein he would assault any one of ourselves under similar circumstances. Neither, so far as Eve allowed the bodily senses to serve as instruments of temptation, have we reason to think that the trial at all differed from that to which the like inlets subject ourselves. The devil threw in a suspicion as to the goodness of God, suggesting that the restriction as to the not eating of a particular fruit was harsh and uncalled for, and insinuating, moreover, that the results of disobedience would be just the reverse of what had been threatened. And, certainly, this is much the way in which Satan still proceeds: whatever the commandment, our obedience to which is being put to the proof, he tries to make us feel that the commandment is unnecessarily severe, and that, in all probability, the infringing it will not be visited with such vengeance as has been denounced.

Thus also with regard to the bodily senses. Eve was tempted through the eye, for she saw that the tree was pleasant to the sight; she was tempted also through the appetite, for she saw that the tree was good for food. And this was precisely as the senses are now instrumental to the service of sin: no doubt

now that our nature has become depraved, these senses are readier avenues than before for the entrance of sin into the heart: but, nevertheless, the eye and the taste, in the instance of Eve before she transgressed, acted a part of the very same kind as they perform now in cases of every day experience.

Indeed it ought to be observed that, according to St. John, all the sin that tempts mankind may be comprised in these three terms, "the lust of the flesh; the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." To these three may evidently be reduced the temptation of our first parents: there was "the lust of the flesh," in that the fruit was desired as good for food; "the lust of the eye," in that the fruit was pleasant to the sight; and "the pride of life," in that it was "to be desired to make one wise." To the same three may as evidently be reduced the temptation of the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, on this very account, may be declared to have been "tempted in all points like as we are." Our blessed Savior was assailed through "the lust of the flesh," when tempted to satisfy his hunger by turning stones into bread. "The lust of the eye" was employed, when the devil would have had Him cast Himself from a pinnacle of the Temple, and thus obtain, by an useless and ostentatious miracle, the applauses of the crowd assembled there for worship. And "the pride of life" was appealed to, when Satan proffered our Lord "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory," on condition of his falling down and worshipping him.

These three departments are still

those under which all sin may be ranged. If you take any particular temptation, you may always make it answer to one of the terms, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." So that—to recur to our introductory remark—there passed no such change on human nature in consequence of apostasy, as that the elements of our constitution became different from what they were. If our first parents, whilst yet unfallen, were assailed in the same way, and through the same channels, as ourselves on whom they fastened corruption; if our blessed Redeemer, who took our nature without taint of original sin, was tempted in the modes in which temptation still makes its approaches; we may most justly conclude that our constitution remains what it was, except, indeed, that our moral powers have been grievously weakened, and that a bias towards evil has been laid on our affections, which places us at a real disadvantage, whensoever assailed by the world, the flesh, or the devil.

But when we have thus in a measure identified our constitution with that of our first parents before they transgressed, it is highly interesting and instructive to study all the circumstances of the original temptation, and to see whether they may not still be often, and accurately paralleled. So long as we separate, or so distinguish, ourselves from our first parents in their unfallen state, as though there had been an actual difference in nature, the account of the original transgression is little more to us than a curious record, from which we can hardly think to derive many personal lessons. But when we have ascertained that our first parents were ourselves, only with moral powers in unbroken vigor, and with senses not yet degraded to the service of evil, the history of their fall assumes all the interest which belongs to the narrative of events, which not merely involve us in their consequences, but the repetition of which is likely to occur, and should be earnestly guarded against.

We wish, therefore, on the present occasion, to examine with all carefulness the workings of Eve's mind at that critical moment when the devil, under the form of a serpent, sought to turn her away from her allegiance to God. This is no mere curious exami-

nation, as it might indeed be, had Eve, before she yielded to temptation, been differently constituted from one of ourselves. But it has been the object of our foregoing remarks, to show you that there was not this difference in constitution: a piece of mechanism may have its springs disordered and its workings deranged; but it is not a different piece of mechanism from what it was when every part was in perfect operation; and we may find, as we go on, that the workings of Eve's mind were wonderfully similar to those of our own, so that we shall not only sustain all our foregoing argument, but be able to present our common mother as a warning, and to derive from her fall instruction of the most practical and personal kind. Without then further preface—though you must bear in mind what we have advanced, that you may not think to evade the application of the subject, by imagining differences between Eve and yourselves—let us go to the patient consideration of the several statements of our text; let us examine what may be gathered in regard of the exact state of Eve's mind, from her mode of putting, first, the permission of God, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden," and secondly, his prohibition, "The fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."

Now the point of time at which we have to take Eve is one at which she is evidently beginning to waver: she has allowed herself to be drawn into conversation with the serpent, which it would have been wise in her, especially as her husband was not by, to have declined; and there is a sort of unacknowledged restlessness, an uneasiness of feeling, as though God might not be that all-wise and all-gracious Being which she had hitherto supposed. She has not yet, indeed, proceeded to actual disobedience: but she is clearly giving some entertainment to doubts and suspicions: she has not yet broken God's commandment; but she is looking at it with a disposition to question its goodness, and depreciate the risk of setting it at nought. There are certain preludes, or approaches, towards sin, which, even in ourselves, are scarcely to be designated sin, and which must have been still farther removed from it in the unfallen

Eve. You remember how St. James speaks, "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin." The Apostle, you observe, does not give the name of sin to the first motions: if these motions were duly resisted, as they might be, the man would have been tempted, but not have actually sinned.

And if so much may be allowed of ourselves, in whom inclinations and propensities are corrupted and depraved through original sin, much more must it have been true of Eve, when, if tottering, she had not yet fallen from her first estate. She was then still innocent: but there were feelings at work which were fast bringing her to the edge of the precipice; and it is on the indication of these feelings that, for the sake of warning and example, we wish especially to fix your attention.

It was a large and liberal grant which God had made to man of the trees of the garden. "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat." It is true, indeed, there was one exception to this permission: man was not to eat of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil;" but of every other tree he might not only eat, he was told to "eat freely," as though God would assure him of their being all unreservedly at his disposal. But now, observe, that, when Eve comes to recount this generous grant, she leaves out the word "freely," and thus may be said to depreciate its liberality. "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden." This is but a cold version of the large-hearted words, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat." She is evidently more disposed to dwell on the solitary restriction than on the generous permission: she is thinking more of the hardship from the one than of the privilege from the other. It was a bad, a dangerous symptom, that Eve suffered herself to look slightly on the rich mercies with which she was blessed, and that she could speak of those mercies, if not in a disparaging tone, at least without that grateful acknowledgement which their abundance demanded. It laid her perilously open to the insinuations of Satan, that she was contrasting what she had not, magnifying the latter, and depreciating the former.

But is not the symptom one which may be frequently found amongst ourselves? Indeed it is; and we point it out in the instance of Eve, that each one of you may learn to watch it in himself. There is in all of us a disposition to think little of what God gives us to enjoy, and much of what He gives us to suffer. It may be but one tree which He withholds, and there may be a hundred which He grants: but, alas! the one, because withheld, will seem to multiply into the hundred, the hundred, because granted, to shrink into the one. If He take from us a single blessing, how much more ready are we to complain as though we had lost all, than to count up what remain, and give Him thanks for the multitude. He has but to forbid us a single gratification, and, presently, we speak as though He had dealt with us with a churlish and niggardly hand, though, were we to attempt to reckon the evidences of his loving-kindness, they are more in number than the hairs of our head. And when we suffer ourselves in any measure to speak, or think, disparagingly of the mercies of God, it is very evident that we are making way for, if not actually indulging, suspicions as to the goodness of God; and it cannot be necessary to prove that he, who allows himself to doubt the Divine goodness, is preparing himself for the breach of any and every commandment.

Learn then to be very watchful over this moral symptom. Be very fearful of depreciating your mercies. It shewed an intensesness of danger in the instance of Eve, that, when God had given her permission to "eat freely," she could speak of herself as permitted only to "eat." There was no falsehood in her account of the permission: she does not deny that she was allowed to eat of the trees of the garden; but there was a dissatisfied and querulous way of putting the permission, as though she avoided the word "freely," that she might not magnify the riches of the Divine liberality. And we warn you, by the fall of Eve, against the allowing yourselves to think slightly of your mercies. It matters not what may be your trials, what your afflictions:—none of you can be so stripped but what, if he will think over the good which God has left in his possession, he will find cause for acknowledging in God a gracious and a generous

benefactor. But if, because you are debarred from this or that enjoyment, or because this or that blessing is placed out of reach, you make little of, or comparatively forget, the rich gifts of God; ah! then indeed there is a fearful probability of your being left to harden into the unthankful and unbelieving: with Eve, you may seem only to leave out the word "freely;" but God, who is jealous as well as generous, may punish the omission by such withdrawal of his grace as shall be followed by open violation of his law.

O for hearts to magnify the Lord's mercies, and count up his loving-kindnesses! It is "freely" that He has permitted us to eat of the trees of the garden. He has imposed no harsh restrictions, none but what, shortsighted though we are, we may already perceive designed for our good. Placed as we are amid a throng of mercies, rich fruits already ripened for our use, and richer maturing as our portion for eternity, shall we speak of Him as though He had dealt out sparingly the elements of happiness? Shall we—just because there is forbidden fruit, of which we are assured that to eat it is to die; or withered fruit, of which we should believe that it would not have been blighted unless to make us seek better—shall we deny the exuberant provision which God hath made for us as intelligent, accountable creatures? Shall we forget the abundance with which He has mantled the earth, the gorgeous clusters with which He has hung the firmament, the blessings of the present life, the promises of a future, and the munificent grant with which He has installed us as Christians into a sort of universal possession, "All things are yours; ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's?"

Nay, we again say, take ye good heed of misrepresenting God, of depreciating your mercies, of exaggerating your losses. There cannot be a worse sign, a sign of greater moral peril, than when a man repines at what is lost, as though there were not much more left, and dwells more on God as withholding certain things, than as bestowing a thousand times as many. And that you may be aware of the dangerousness of the symptom, and thereby led to cultivate a thankful spirit, a spirit disposed to compare what God gives with what He de-

nies;—a comparison which will always make the latter seem little, because immeasurably exceeded by the former—study with all care the instance of Eve, and observe that her first indication of tottering towards her fatal apostasy lay in this, that, when God had issued the large and generous charter, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat," she could reduce it into the cold and measured allowance, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden."

But we may go farther in tracing in Eve the workings of a dissatisfied mind, of a disposition to suspect God of harshness, notwithstanding the multiplied evidences of his goodness. You are next to observe how she speaks of the prohibition in regard of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil." She left out a most important and significant word in stating God's permission as to the trees of the garden, and thus did much to divest that permission of its generous character. But she inserted words when she came to mention the prohibition, and by that means invested it with more of strictness and severity than God seems to have designed. The prohibition as it issued from God was, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it." But the prohibition as repeated by Eve was, "Of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it." She affirmed, you observe, that God had forbidden the touching the fruit as well as the eating of it; whereas it does not appear that God had said anything as to the touching. There might indeed have been prudence in not touching what might not be eaten; for he who allowed himself to handle would be very likely to allow himself to taste. Still, the touching the fruit was not, as far as we know, actually forbidden by God; and we may therefore say of Eve, that she exaggerated the prohibition, even as she had before disparaged the permission.

And you will readily perceive that precisely the same temper or feeling was at work when Eve exaggerated the prohibition, and when she disparaged the permission. There was in both cases the same inclination to misrepresent God, as though He dealt harshly with his creatures: to leave out the word "free-

ly" was to make his grant look less liberal; to put in the words, "neither shall ye touch it," was to make his law look more rigid; and it was evidently the dictate of the same rising suspicion, or a part of the same tacit accusation, when God's gifts were depreciated, and when his restrictions were magnified.

Alas for Eve, that she could thus ascribe harshness to God, and speak as though He denied his creatures any approach towards knowledge. She might as well have said that God had forbidden them to look upon the tree; whereas it is clear that not only might they look at the fruit, but that the eye was able to detect certain properties of the fruit; for you read that "the woman saw that the tree was good for food," the color probably informing her something of its nature. And we cannot tell what additional information might have been obtained through touching the fruit. But if the eye could detect certain properties, the touch, in all probability, detected more. Even in the darkness and feebleness into which we have fallen, each sense is instrumental to the ascertaining the qualities of substances; and this power of the senses must have been vastly greater in our first parents; Adam gave names to every living creature, the names undoubtedly being expressive of the natures, and thus showed that he could ascertain at once, without any informant but himself, their several characteristics.

We may, therefore, reasonably infer that, whilst eating of the tree of knowledge was distinctly forbidden, and thus our first parents were debarred from such discoveries as the sense of taste might have imparted, they were able to determine a great deal in regard of the fruit, through their other senses, of which they were allowed the unrestricted use. But Eve, you see, was disposed to make out that God had extended his prohibition to other senses besides that of taste, and thus had prevented them from making any advance towards the knowledge of good and of evil. You would have argued, from her version of the prohibition, that God had altogether enclosed, or shut up the tree, guarding it with the most extreme jealousy and rigor, so that there was no possibility of detecting any of its properties. Whereas the restriction was only on the ex-

amining the fruit, in and through that sense which would make it bring death; and there was the warrant of the Divine word, that to taste would be to die. All that could be learnt—and it was probably very considerable—from sight, and touch, and scent, Adam and Eve were at liberty to learn; whilst what the taste could have taught was distinctly revealed; and thus the single prohibition did not so much withhold them from the acquisition of knowledge, as from the experience of disaster.

But now, was Eve singular in the misrepresenting the prohibition of God? was she not rather doing what has been done ever since, what is done every day by those who would excuse themselves from the duties and obligations of religion? To hear men of the world talk about religion, you might imagine that God's law forbade all enjoyment whatsoever of the pleasures and satisfactions of life, that it prescribed nothing but gloom and austerity, and required from those who would save the soul, that they should forego every gratification which their nature solicits. They will talk to you of piety, as if it were necessarily of a most morose and melancholy tenor, as if it debarred men from all participation in visible good, requiring them to move amid what is bright, and beautiful, and attractive in creation, but only that they might mortify the propensities which find therein their counterpart objects. Because God has distinctly forbidden our finding our chief good in earthly things, because He has limited us to a moderate or temperate use of these things, therefore will men perversely misrepresent his enactments, and pretend that He would shut them up in the most dismal seclusion, as though He had given them appetites which were not to be gratified, desires which were only to be resisted, and yet, all the while, had surrounded them with what those appetites crave, and those desires solicit. Whereas, there is nothing prohibited by the Divine law but just that indulgence of our appetites and desires, which, because excessive and irregular, would, from our very constitution, be visited with present disappointment and remorse, and, from the necessary character of a retributive government, with future vengeance and death.

We suppose it capable of a most

thorough demonstration, that the man of religion, the man who allows himself in no indulgence which religion forbids, whose appetites are never his masters, but who is "temperate in all things," has more actual enjoyment, even of what earth can afford, than the reckless slave of sense, who, in the expressive language of Scripture, would "work all uncleanness with greediness." And there never, we believe, was a false charge than that which would fasten upon religion such a severe code of precepts, and such a stern series of sacrifices, as must make its disciples do perpetual violence to their feelings, and live within reach of pleasures in which they must deny themselves all share: whilst they who renounce religion are dividing amongst themselves whatever good the present life can give. Religion forbids all that is irregular or excessive in the use of earthly things; but it forbids nothing more; and whilst we are constituted as we are, whilst there is no slavery so oppressive as the being slaves to our own lusts, whilst there are the irrepressible workings within us of a great moral principle, causing uneasiness, and even anguish, to follow on criminal indulgence—nay, it is no boast of idle declamation, it is the statement of a simple and sober calculation, that the religious man, partaking only so far as religion permits, enjoys, in a much higher degree than the thorough-paced worldling, the very objects for which that worldling throws away his soul.

Thus God is just doing with us as He did with our first parents in regard of the tree of knowledge. He did not altogether debar them from that tree; He only debarred them from eating of that tree; knowing that they had but to eat of it, and they would find it to be death. And He does not debar us from the enjoyment of earthly things: He debars us only from that unbridled and unlawful indulgence which tends directly to the destruction of both body and soul.

But it is with us as it was with Eve. As a sort of excuse for breaking God's commandments, we represent those commandments as forbidding the touching, when they forbid only the tasting. We try to make out religion as all gloom and austerity; and ask, whether it be not something too much to expect, that, with such a nature as God has given us,

and placed in such a world as that assigned for our dwelling, the nature soliciting the very objects which are presented by the world, we should hold ourselves altogether aloof from present gratifications, and live as though we had no senses, no appetites, no desires. Ah, my brethren, the younger more especially, and such as are yet looking upon religion with distaste and dislike, be candid, and tell us whether it be not the apprehension of having to give up all that is pleasant and agreeable, and to settle into a life of moroseness and melancholy, which makes you turn with aversion from the proffers and promises of the Gospel?

But is it in pure ignorance that you thus misrepresent religion? is it through an actual misunderstanding as to what God permits, and what He prohibits? Nay, not exactly so; we must probe you a little deeper. Ye are thoroughly aware, even though you may strive to hide the knowledge from yourselves as well as from others, that God hath said, "Of every tree of the garden ye may freely eat." He hath not, ay, and ye know that He hath not, filled his creation with attractions on purpose to keep his rational creatures at perpetual strife with themselves, merely to exercise them in self-denial, and give them occasion of doing violence to all the feelings of their nature. On the contrary, it is the decision of an Apostle, "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving." It is the abuse, not the use of the creature which God hath forbidden. His prohibition commences only where indulgence virtually defeats its own end, the ministering to happiness: it allows all the participation which beings, conscious of immortality, can enjoy without a blush. And how, knowing this—for ye do know it; ye know that religion is not meant to turn the earth into a desert; ye know that practically it does not turn the earth into a desert, for that religious persons may have their share in all that is really bright and sweet in life, yea, and relish it the more as the gift of a heavenly Father, and enjoy it the more because enjoying it temperately and subordinately—how is it, that, knowing all this, ye contrive to justify yourselves in continued disregard of the demands and duties of religion? Ah,

we will not pretend to follow you into every subterfuge, nor to dissect every falsehood. But we look at the case of our first mother: we see how, when she was inclining to disobedience, she wrought herself up into opposition to the commandment by perversely magnifying its strictness. And we can believe that you do much the same. You take pains to hide from yourselves the real facts of the case. You leave out a word, when you speak of God's permissions; you put in words, when you speak of his prohibitions. When God hath said, "Ye shall not eat of it," and ye are secretly persuaded that herein He hath only consulted for your good, ye repeat, as your version of the commandment, till perhaps you almost believe it to be true, "Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it."

But there was a yet worse symptom in Eve, one still more indicative of the fatal disease which was making way into her veins. It was bad enough, whether to depreciate God's permission, or to exaggerate his prohibition; but it was worse to soften away his threatenings. This showed the workings of unbelief; and there could, indeed, have been but a step between our common mother and ruin, when she had brought herself to look doubtingly on the word of the Lord. And this symptom is even more strongly marked than those which we have already examined. The declaration of God had been, "Thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." But what is Eve's version of this strong and unqualified declaration? "Ye shall not eat of it, lest ye die." "Lest ye die," this is what she substitutes for "in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." "Lest ye die," an expression which implies a sort of chance, a contingency, a bare possibility, what might happen, or might not happen, what might happen soon, or might not happen for years—it is thus she puts a denunciation as express, as explicit, as language can furnish, "in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Alas now for Eve! Harboring a thought that God would not carry his threatenings into execution—and this she must have harbored, ere she could have softened these threatenings into "lest ye die"—no marvel if she gave a

ready ear to the lie of the serpent, "Ye shall not surely die." She had whispered his lie to herself, before it was uttered by Satan: the devil could do little then, and he can do little now, except as openings are made for him by those on whom he seeks to work. It was probably the incipient unbelief, manifested by the "lest ye die" of Eve, which suggested, as the best mode of attack, the "ye shall not surely die" of Satan. The devil may well hope to be believed, so soon as he sees symptoms of God's being disbelieved.

And if we could charge upon numbers, in the present day, the imitating Eve in the disparaging God's permissions, and the exaggerating his prohibitions, can we have any difficulty in continuing the parallel, now that the thing done is the making light of his threatenings? Why, what fills hell like the secretly cherished thought, that perhaps, after all, there may be no hell to fill? What is a reader, or more frequent, engine for the destruction of the soul, than a false idea of the compassion of God as sure to interfere, either to shorten the duration, or to mitigate the intensity, of future punishment, if not altogether to prevent its infliction? God hath said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." But when men come to give their version of so stern and emphatic a declaration, they put it virtually into some such shape as this, "The soul should not sin, lest it die." Christ hath said, "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned;" men, however, practically throw this sweeping and startling affirmation into a much smoother formula, "Believe upon Christ, lest ye die."

"Lest ye die"—is this then all? is there any doubt? is it a contingency? is it a may be? "Lest ye die," when God hath said, "Ye shall surely die." "Lest ye die," when God hath said, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God." "Lest ye die," when God hath said, "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." Nay, ye may give the paragraph a smoother turn, but ye cannot give the punishment a

shorter term. Ye may soften away the expressions, ye can neither abbreviate nor mitigate the vengeance. "If we believe not," saith St. Paul, "yet He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself." It may make punishment all the more tremendous, that there hath been the secret indulgence of a hope that God would never execute his threatenings to the letter; but, assuredly, such a hope, as being itself but the offspring of unbelief, can never produce change, in the declared purpose of the moral Governor of the universe.

And yet, such is the constancy in human perverseness, the feeling which wrought in Eve, before she eat the fatal fruit, is just that which is most powerfully at work amongst her descendants. There is not perhaps one of you, who, if he be still living in unrepented sin, is not secretly disposed to the regarding God as too gracious to visit iniquity with everlasting destruction, to the resolving into the exaggerations of the priesthood, or, at all events, into denunciations whose ends will be answered by their delivery without their execution, the tremendous announcements of a worm that dieth not, and of a fire that is not quenched.

It is not, that, if ye were pushed into an argument, or urged to a confession, ye would, in so many words, assert an expectation of such a difference between punishment as threatened, and punishment as put in force, as might make it comparatively safe for you to set at nought God's law. We do not suppose that Eve would have done this: she would not, even to herself, have acknowledged so much as this. But it is, that ye have a smooth way of putting the threatenings of the law; you per-

haps think that there is a great deal of metaphor in the Bible, much which was never meant to be literally understood, much which was only for local or temporary application; and so, at last, "lest ye die," an expression which just implies some measure of risk, comes to pass with you (so far as you think on such matters at all) as a very fair exposition of "Ye shall surely die," an expression denoting the most absolute certainty.

But, now, be warned by the instance of Eve. She allowed herself to give a smooth turn to the threatening of God. She invented, and never was invention so pregnant with disaster to the world, the doubtful suggestion, "Lest ye die," as a substitute for the awful affirmation, "Ye shall surely die." But, acting on the supposition that "Lest ye die," might fairly pass as the meaning of "Ye shall surely die," she "brought death into the world, and all our woe."

In her case, indeed, tremendous though the consequences were, there was a remedy: our first parents fell, but were arrested by a Mediator in their fatal descent. But in your case—if the soul be staked on the chance, that God threatens more than He will execute, and if ye find, as find ye must, that "ye shall surely die" meant what it said—no exaggeration, no metaphor—alas! there will then be no remedy for you: the hour will be passed, the day will be gone: though now a Mediator waits to make true to all penitents the bold falsehood of Satan, "Ye shall not surely die," there shall be no deliverance hereafter for such as have been presumptuous enough to sin, in the hope, or with the thought, that God will not be stern enough to strike.

SERMON VII.

SEEKING AFTER FINDING.

“ They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward.”—JEREMIAH I. 5.

The chapter from which these words are taken is filled with predictions of the overthrow of Babylon, and of the deliverance of the Jews from their haughty oppressors. There can be no doubt that these predictions had at least a primary reference to the demolition of the Chaldean Empire by Cyrus, and to the consequent emancipation of the captive citizens of Jerusalem. But, as is generally if not always the case with prophecies of this class, there would appear to be a secondary reference to the destruction of the mystic Babylon, closely associated as it will be with the restoration of the scattered tribes of Israel, and with the triumphant estate of the Christian Church.

It would seem that from the first the enemies of God and his people which one age has produced, have served as types of those who will arise in the latter days of the world; and that the judgments by which they have been overtaken, have been so constructed as to figure the final vengeance on Antichrist and his followers. Hence it is that so many prophecies appear to require as well as to admit a double fulfilment; they could hardly delineate the type and not delineate also the antitype; whilst we may believe that the Spirit, which moved the holy men of old, designed that what it inspired should serve for the instruction of remote ages as well as of near.

That the predictions in the chapter before us referred to what is yet future, as well as to what has long ago passed, will appear from a careful attention to the terms in which they are couched. In the verse immediately preceding our

text, you find this statement: “ In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the Lord their God.” These words describe a great national contrition. The scattered tribes have been brought to a deep sense of their rebellion against the God of their fathers, and are inclined accordingly to return to his service. But it would hardly appear that there was any such general repentance preparatory to the return of the Jews from Babylon, though we have decisive testimony, from various parts of Scripture, that there will be antecedently to the final restoration of the Israelites to Canaan. And besides this, you will not fail to observe that the children of Israel are here combined with the children of Judah; whereas only the latter were captives in Babylon, and only the latter were emancipated by Cyrus. Whenever, as in this instance, prophecy speaks of any gathering together of the twelve tribes, of which the kingdom of Israel had ten, that of Judah only two, we seem obliged to understand it as relating to the future; there having as yet been no event which can be regarded as the predicted restoration of the ten tribes whom Shalmaneser removed.

On this and other accounts which it is not important to specify, we conclude that in its secondary, if not in its primary, application, our text is connected with that august event, the theme of so many prophecies, the centre of so many hopes, the reinstatement in Canaan of the children of Israel. And it may possibly indicate from what various and remote

districts of the earth shall the exiles be gathered, that there is to be that ignorance of the road to Jerusalem which the words before us express. We know that the whole globe is strewed with the Jews, so that you can scarcely find the country where this people, though distinct from every other, has not made itself a home. But the dwelling place of the ten tribes is still an unsolved problem: neither the navigator in his voyagings round the world, nor the traveller in his searchings over continents, has yet lighted on the mysterious seclusion where rest the descendants of those who, for their sins, were cast out from Samaria. It may well then be, that when, moved by one impulse from above, the thousands of the chosen seed, whether in the east, or west, or north, or south, shall resolve on seeking the land of their fathers, it will be almost like the quest of some unknown region, so indistinct will be the memory, and so darkened the tradition, of the long-lost inheritance. With numbers there may be nothing beyond a vague knowledge of the direction in which Palestine must lie, so that they will be able to turn their faces thitherward, but not to determine by what road to proceed. And this is precisely what is represented in our text. The children of Israel and the children of Judah, dissolved in tears on account of their now felt ingratitude and wickedness, have turned themselves towards Jerusalem, but are still forced to inquire the way. One seems to behold a band of the exiles weeping and nevertheless exulting, penetrated with sorrow for sins, and yet animated with the persuasion that the Lord was about to make bare his arm and gather home his banished ones. They press along the desert, they crowd to the shore; and of every one whom they meet they demand, in a voice of eagerness and anxiety, Where, where is our home, the beautiful land which God gave to our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

But you will readily judge that it cannot be on this, the literal sense or fulfilment of the text, that we design to speak at any length. You are always prepared for our regarding the Jews as a typical people, and finding in the events of their history emblems of what occurs to the Christian Church. We shall therefore at once detach the text from

its connexion with the Jews, whether in their past deliverance from Babylon, or their yet future restoration to Canaan, and consider it as descriptive of what may be found amongst Christians, who have to quit a moral bondage, and find their way to a spiritual Zion.

The singularity of the passage, when thus interpreted or applied, lies in the face of the inquirer being towards Zion, whilst he is yet forced to ask what road he ought to take. "They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward." They are in the right road, or at least are advancing in the right direction; but, nevertheless, whether through ignorance, or through fear of even the possibility of mistake, they continually make inquiries as to the path to be followed. We think that this circumstance, if considered as to be exemplified in our own spiritual history, will furnish abundant material for interesting and profitable discourse. It is a circumstance which indicates such honesty of purpose in the inquirer, such vigilance, such circumspection, such anxiety to be right, and such dread of being wrong, as should distinguish every Christian, though too often we look for them in vain. And, at the same time, we evidently learn that persons are not always fair judges of their spiritual condition; they may be asking the way like those who are in ignorance and darkness, and all the while their faces may be towards Zion. Let it be our endeavor to compass different classes within our present discourse; considering in the first place, the case of those who, though going right, suppose themselves going wrong; and, in the second place, that of those who believe themselves right, but yet desire further assurance; for of both classes it may equally be said, "They ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward."

Now it is the object of such parables as that of the tares and the wheat, or that of the great net let down into the sea, and which gathered of all kinds, bad as well as good, to teach us that there is to be a mixture in the visible Church, and that it is not men's business to attempt a separation. We are all too much disposed to exercise a spirit of judgment, to pronounce opinions on the condition of our fellow-men, whether the living or the dead, just as

though we had access to God's book, and could infallibly read its registered decisions. But there is every thing in the Bible to warn us against this spirit of judgment, and to urge us, on the contrary, to a spirit of charity; our inability to read the heart, which is the prerogative of God alone, being given as a sufficient reason why we should refrain from passing verdicts; and our duty as members of the same mystic body, being set forth as that of hoping all things, bearing one another's burdens, rather than scrutinizing one another's faults.

And a very comforting remembrance it is, that we are not to stand or fall by human decision, that our portion for eternity is not to be settled by what men think of us here; for so furious is the spirit of religious party, and so determined are numbers on making their own favorite dogma the alone passport to heaven, that many of the most lowly followers of Christ would be given over to perdition, and many of the most arrogant boasters chartered for everlasting life, were the verdicts of the Christian world to be final, and no appeal to lie to a higher tribunal. We always think that there is something very touching in those words of the Redeemer, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them." It is as much as to say, the world may not know them; in the judgment of men, many pass for my sheep who are not, and many who are, may be excluded from my flock; but I, I who cannot be deceived, I know my sheep, and will infallibly distinguish them at last from the goats.

But not only are men likely to deliver a false judgment upon others, and therefore bound to confine their chief scrutiny to themselves, it is further very possible that they may form a wrong opinion of their own spiritual state, not only, as you all know, in concluding themselves safe whilst in danger, but, as is perhaps less suspected, in concluding themselves in danger whilst safe. In his more private ministrations amongst his people, a clergyman will not unfrequently find the case of a depressed and disconsolate individual, who obtains none of the comforts, though he is all alive to the duties, of religion. It gives him no surprise that there should be such cases; for he knows that they are expressly provided for in Scripture,—as, for ex-

ample, in that passage of the prophet Isaiah, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." Here the case is evidently supposed of religion existing in its genuineness, though in none of its comforts: the man fears the Lord, and obeys the voice of his servant; but, all the while, is surrounded by impenetrable darkness, even darkness which may be felt. And the direction to such a man, a direction to stay himself upon his God, is one which clearly assumes the reality of his piety, and as clearly asserts that he is not in danger, because not in light.

But whilst the minister is quite prepared for these cases, and quite aware that the spiritual gloom is no index of the spiritual state, he finds them singularly difficult and perplexing; and that, too, because they are commonly the cases of parties suffering from bodily disease, disease perhaps of the nerves, and whom that very circumstance incapacitates for judging with accuracy their spiritual state. If, through God's blessing on the prescriptions of the physician, a more wholesome tone be given to the nervous system, brighter views will quickly be reached of the condition of the soul: on the other hand, if the sickness increase, the moral darkness will become thicker and thicker: and whilst the minister is thoroughly assured that all these alternations are but proofs how the body can act upon the mind, and therefore noways affect the spiritual estate, the patient will take them as so many evidences of advance or decline in genuine religion.

We know nothing to be done, in these and the like cases, but the endeavoring to shew men how utterly distinct are the reality of religion and its comforts; and how independent is that which is to save them on the frames and feelings of which they may be conscious. They are downcast because faith seems weak, or elated because it seems strong; whereas it is not faith which is to save them, but Christ; and whilst faith, whether in itself or its evidences, may change from day to day, Christ changes not, but is "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." And we always think it safe to tell those who are spiritually depressed,

that their very depression is no mean argument of their safety; for so unnatural is it to man to feel anxious for his soul, that, wheresoever there is the anxiety, we recognize a higher agency, even a Divine, as having wrought to excite the solicitude. It certainly follows, that the man who is depressed as to his state before God, must be anxious as to that state; and we know not how, as a corrupt and fallen creature, he was to have become thus anxious, had not God's Spirit acted on his conscience, and commenced in him a work of moral renovation. So that there ought to be comfort even in the very wretchedness: you would not have been thus disquieted had you been left to yourselves; and that you have not been left to yourselves should prove to you that God is not willing that you should perish, nay, that He has already undertaken the bringing you to Himself.

And over and above these cases of depression, in which one cause or another weaves darkness round a man, so that, whilst his face is towards Zion, he cannot perceive that he is on the road to the heavenly city, we nothing doubt that there are many instances of parties, who have begun in true religion, and nevertheless think that the first step has not been taken. It is not always, nay, it is not, we believe, often, that conversion is suddenly effected, nor through some special instrumentality which fixes, as it were, the date of the change. In the majority of cases, the change, we are inclined to believe, is gradual, imperceptibly effected, so that, although the man becomes at length conscious of a great moral alteration, he cannot tell you when it commenced, nor by what steps it went on. There is no one thing more distinguishable from another, than is the converted state from the unconverted; but the transition from the one to the other may be accomplished by such slow degrees, that the individual, who is its subject, shall not know with precision when or where the first movement took place.

And we rejoice in the assurance that many, who would not venture to think themselves on the way to Zion, are actually walking in the direction of that city. They who have a sincere wish to be enabled to forsake sin, and who are endeavoring accordingly to break away

from evil habits; they who tremble at God's word, though as yet they have not found a shelter from its threatenings; they who are so moved by a sense of danger that they earnestly inquire, "What must we do to be saved?" though they have not yet heard the answer in the depths of the heart—on all these the minister of the Gospel looks with great hopefulness: they may not themselves be aware of their having actually entered the heavenward path; but he considers their anxiety, their fear, their solicitude, as so many evidences of their having begun in religion, and he anticipates, with indescribable pleasure, their being "followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Regarding conversion as a gradual work, a work in which "one soweth and another reapeth," we do not look on those, who are evidently confirmed believers, as the only travellers towards the celestial city: we rejoice in thinking that there are numbers, in whom the moral change is not yet distinctly marked, but who are nevertheless in the act of passing the strait gate.

Yea, with every wish to avoid giving encouragement where there is yet needed warning, we do feel authorized in taking fears for the soul, and desires for its safety, as evidences of a man's being in the pathway of life. We might almost say, that, in religion, anxiety to begin is itself a beginning: the seeking the road is the being in the road: and though the inquirers themselves may not venture to think that they have yet done more than inquire, oh, we can regard them as having already virtually found that of which they are in quest: they may only consider themselves as asking the way to Zion; but we can feel that they are of those who ask the way to Zion "with their faces thitherward."

But let us pass on to the case of men, in regard of whom there can be no doubt that they have made a beginning, and let us see what our text may indicate as to these more advanced characters. We may justly suppose that the parties, to whom the prophecy originally applied, had set out on the journey from Babylon to Zion: they had commenced; but, either through finding themselves in places where different roads met, or through desire to be more and more as-

sured of being right, they still ask the way to the land of their fathers. And we hardly know where to begin, in pointing out to you how illustrative this should be of the conduct of the Christian, as he journeys towards the heavenly inheritance. There are many things indicated by this asking the way to Zion, on which it would be well that your attention should be turned.

Let it first be observed, that a Christian should never be too confident; that he should never take for granted, as a point on which there could not be doubt, that he is indeed "a new creature," and on the high road to the kingdom. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith," is a precept which cannot be inappropriate at any stage of the Christian life; for where a mistake is so possible, and where the consequences of a mistake are so disastrous, it is the part of common prudence to be frequently considering whether or not we have been deceiving ourselves, having a name to live, whilst yet dead in God's sight. We have no wish, indeed, to debar you from the enjoyment of the privileges of the Gospel: we are only anxious that your title to these privileges should be clear; and this, we are persuaded, it cannot be, except through a frequent process of close self-examination. For it is not a general sense of your election unto life which should satisfy you of your safety. This may be, and often is, nothing more than a suggestion of Satan to blind you to your danger. Do you find an increasing delight in secret prayer? does sin seem to you more and more odious? are you more and more penetrated by the exceeding great love of God in giving his Son to die for your sakes? is holiness becoming your happiness, duty your privilege, and heaven the very home of your affections? These, and the like, questions are those which you should be frequently proposing to yourselves. On the answer to these, an answer given as in the sight of a heart-searching God, should rest your answer to the most momentous of all questions, "Are we on the way to Zion?"

And if the answer to this last question can only be come at through the answer to a series of inquiries, each of which may be said to need, from its very nature, the being daily proposed, it necessarily follows, that you ought to be imi-

tating the children of Judah and Israel, asking as to the road to Zion, however you may hope that your faces are already thitherward. Can this be the way to Zion in which I am? Ask the dead, who have reached that heavenly city: with one voice they will tell you, that, if it be the right way, it is a way of self-denial, leading you through mortified lusts, and over subjugated affections; and then judge ye whether or not it be such a way in which you are found. Ask the living, of whom you have best cause to believe that they are heirs of the kingdom: they will assure you that the way is one of faith and obedience, every step of which is an advance in the knowledge of your own depraved hearts, and in the sense of the worth and sufficiency of Christ; and then judge ye whether or not this can be the way in which you are walking. Ask the Bible, on whose pages the Holy Spirit hath mapped out the path, and it will tell you that the way is a narrow way, which will not admit of your encumbering yourselves with perishable things, but which can be traversed only by those who lay aside every weight; and then judge ye whether ye have obtained the description of a path which ye yourselves are pursuing. And ask ye, yet further, of God. This seems to have been the practice of the Psalmist; for you may remember his words, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." By diligent and fervent prayer, make inquiry of God as to the road which conducts to the place where He dwells. And the answer, to this inquiry, an answer, which, if there be sincerity in the inquirer, shall certainly not be withheld, will expose to you the deceitfulness of all hope of reaching Zion, which is not founded on the appropriation of the merits of the Redeemer, the reality of that appropriation being proved by the produced fruits of righteousness; and then determine whether such answer ought to leave you assured that you are not self-deceived, when concluding yourselves in the heavenward path.

But of whomsoever the question be asked, we wish you clearly to understand that the question itself, the question as to the way to Zion, is not a question to be put by none but beginners in religion,

who have yet to learn the very elements of Christianity, and to take the first step in separation from the world. It is a question for the most advanced Christian amongst you, if not because he may be ignorant of the way and therefore need direction, yet because he requires to be reminded of the way, that he may compare his own course with the chart, and see whether he have not wandered, turning aside either to the right hand or the left. For if it may be, as we have said that it is, by almost imperceptible steps that a man passes from the side of the world to that of God, he may also decline, by almost imperceptible steps, towards that which he hath left—the swerving being at each point so slight as scarce to be observed, although a wide angle may at length result from successive inconsiderable flexions. And if indeed it be possible, that a man, who has entered on the right road, may, through want of constant self-examination, bend from that road, and yet hardly suspect the departure, how important that Christians should imitate the Jews, who, with their faces towards Zion, were still inquiring the road.

It is not doubt, but caution, which we would teach you; not the being always beginning, but the being always diligent to “make your calling and election sure.” We do not wish you to be always uncertain as to whether or not your faces are turned towards Zion; but we wish you to understand that their being so turned is a reason in favor of, not a reason against, your frequently inquiring the heavenly path. It is not sufficient that they be turned; the great matter is, that they be kept turned; and whilst such is your nature, that, without constant vigilance, the direction may be gradually changed, and yet appear to you the same—even as the eyes of a well-drawn portrait follow you as you move, and so might persuade you that you had not moved at all—it is evidently bound on you, by your regard for your safety, that you be always ascertaining the landmarks, in place of judging by your apparent position. Is my life the life of a believer in Christ? is faith producing piety, humility, charity, patience? These are the very milestones, the pillars, the crosses, on the road. If I search not for these, I must remain with-

out the road; and, therefore, is an inquiry as to the way, in order to the determining whether it be the way in which I walk, the only inquiry by which, at any stage, I can ascertain my safety. In short, I am not to conclude that I must be in the right way, because my face, as I think, is Zionwards: I am to conclude that my face is Zionwards, by examining my path, comparing it with that which Scripture delineates as conducting to heaven, and proving that the two are one and the same.

It may not have been from actual ignorance, that they, who had been delivered from Babylon, asked, with so much urgency, the road to Jerusalem. They were on the road, and, though half blinded with the tears of contrition, may have felt that they could scarcely go wrong. But they would make assurance doubly sure. It was a pleasure to them to ask the name of every valley which they crossed, and of every hill which they ascended, and to receive a reply which showed them that their course was indeed towards Zion. And occasionally they stood where different roads met—one perhaps apparently smooth, and leading through rich smiling scenes; and the other rugged, and going off towards a dreary waste—what shall they do but pause till they can clearly determine which road leads to Zion? not wishing to follow the attractive path, if it do not; eager to attempt the repulsive, if it do.

And in all this, we again and again tell you, they were examples to the Christian in his journey to the spiritual Canaan. He can never be too sure that he is right. He may have no reason to suspect that he is wrong; but he is wrong, if, on that account alone, he conclude himself right. Let him be always questioning, questioning himself, questioning others, inquiring of the Bible, inquiring of God. What is this mountain before me? is it on the map? what is this valley which I have to cross, this stream which I have to ford? are they what I was to meet with, or do they show that I have wandered? And here the road divides—which turn am I to take? what is to decide me in this perplexity? Let me be firm on one point—that it is the direction of the road, not its quality, by which I will be determined. The road which leads to heaven, that is my

road, be it, or be it not, strowed with the rocks, and swept by the torrents. Other paths may look more inviting: but I have nothing to do except with their termination: if they conduct not to Zion, I would not venture to follow them even a solitary step, though they might lead me to riches, or honors, or pleasures. This it is to imitate the emancipated Jews. Weep with them if you will; for the sins of every day furnish but too much matter for godly sorrow. Turn your faces, with them, towards Zion: for assuredly this is not your rest, and ye are but strangers and pilgrims below. But be always on the watch, lest ye miss the narrow path; lest, through ignorance, you take the road which looks plainest, or, through indolence, that which seems smoothest, or, through self-indulgence, that which promises most of present advantage; and thus, let this description be literally applicable to yourselves, "They ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward."

But there is yet more to be gathered from this description, when considered as that of a believer in Christ. We have hitherto merely affirmed that, in order to guard against mistake, where mistake would be fatal, it must become the Christian to be always inquiring the way to Zion, like one who knows that he may be deceived, even when to all appearance he has long followed the right path. But we will now suppose him certified as to the direction in which he is proceeding, certified that his face is towards Zion, and nevertheless busying himself with inquiries as to the way. And what would this mark? What should we have to learn from the representation of a Christian as inquiring the way to Zion, though assured that he had been long proceeding in that way?

My brethren, Christianity is that in which no man can be too advanced to study the alphabet. It is that to whose very elements the greatest proficient should often recur, not indeed as though he were to be always a beginner: but because what he begins with he cannot exhaust; and because what he gathers as he proceeds, only fits him the more for understanding and appreciating that with which he commenced. The simple and fundamental doctrines of our holy religion,—the doctrines of hu-

man corruption, of the renewing power of God's Spirit, of the incarnation of the Eternal Word, and of the atonement effected by a Mediator,—these, which may be said to shew the way to Zion, present continually new material for the contemplation and instruction of the Christian. There is a sense in which there is no getting beyond the very alphabet of Christianity; that alphabet will always be beyond us; any one of its letters being as a mighty hieroglyphic which the prayerful student may partially decipher, but the most accomplished scholar never thoroughly expound.

And there cannot be a worse symptom, whether in an individual or in a congregation, than that of distaste for the elementary truths and facts of Christianity. We regard with great anxiety those professing Christians, whose appetites must be stimulated by novelties and varieties in religion, and to whom it is not always a feast, always like "good news from a far country," to hear of the exceeding love of God in giving his dear Son as a propitiation for sin. We are not indeed unmindful of what St. Paul says to the Hebrews, whom he exhorts, that, "leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ," they should go on to perfection; and we fully believe that a Christian may err through confining himself to the elements, in place of striving to comprehend the whole range of truth. Whatsoever God has been pleased to reveal, should be made the subject of study; and we will not desecrate the name of humility by giving it to that temper which would seal up half the Bible, as too obscure to be read with advantage, or too perplexed for the generality of Christians. It is evidently, however, only the resting in "the principles of the doctrine of Christ," which is condemned by St. Paul: he would have us go on to perfection; but but not so as to forget the principles:—who ever soared higher than this Apostle? and yet who ever lingered more fondly on the very threshold of the system, beholding the cross with the earnestness and affection of one who felt it to be the centre of life to a fallen and helpless world? We are to leave the principles, so as to be on the advance in the search after truth: but we are never so to leave them as though we had done

with them, and had no further need to recur to their study. Indeed, in this sense, it is impossible to leave the principles; for the heights and depths of Christian doctrine are but the first elements expanded: the simple truths are the germs of the mysterious: and it is the little cloud which at length spreads, like that seen by the Prophet's servant, into an impenetrable vast, though only that it may refresh and fertilize the earth.

We may therefore justly again speak to you of the badness of the symptom, when a Christian grows weary of the first truths of Christianity, nay, when he is not frequent in dwelling on those truths, as furnishing instruction which he cannot outstrip, and consolation which he cannot exhaust. Tell me not of a man who understands all mysteries, and who is so engaged with abstruse and loftier doctrines, that he may leave to young converts the introductory facts which he has long ago examined, and with which, as placed at the entrance to the heavenward path, he can have no concern when some progress has been made. We dare affirm of the path, that it is not so direct that what we leave remains actually behind us, but rather so winding that what we leave seems frequently before us. In advancing, we apparently return to the same point: he who has taken a lofty flight, if it have indeed been through a region of Christian truth, will commonly find himself, at its close, at the foot of the cross. At least, if he return from the flight, and feel, on looking at the cross, as though it were a dull and common-place object, in comparison of what he had beheld, we may be sure that he has been expatiating in some region of cold and barren speculation, where there may be religion for the intellect, but none for the heart.

We give it, therefore, as no bad criterion for those who have long made profession of godliness,—have we delight in the simple truths of the Gospel, or do we find no pleasure but in an abstruse and argumentative theology, where the understanding is tasked, or the reason appealed to, the imagination dazzled? What preaching contents us? Must we have the logical speaker, who leads us on, by a series of well-contrived steps, to some unexpected conclusion? or the brilliant, who, by his vivid delineations, can charm

us into the belief of truths which we had hitherto overlooked? or is it sufficient to engage our attention and make us all alive to the worth of the ordinance of preaching, that the minister speaks, simply and warmly, on the elements of Christianity, on truths with which we have long been familiar, which have been taught us from infancy, and which are little more than the inscriptions which point the manslayer to the city of refuge? It will be thus with those who are pressing "towards the mark for the prize of their high calling in Christ." The giant in Christ, if we may vary the simile, is so truly the babe in Christ, as always to be leaning upon Him for support; and the sounds which were sweet to him in the first days of spiritual life, will be melodious ever after; not only because music remembered as heard in childhood always steals thrillingly on the ear, as though it were a voice from the tomb, but because the well-known strain breathes to him of all he holds precious, and falls liquidly as a voice from the firmament, inspiring the hope which is "full of immortality."

By this, then, amongst other tests, let those who think themselves advanced in Christianity try their spiritual condition. What ear have they for simple truths simply delivered? In their private studies, what pleasure have they in meditating the first principles of the Gospel? do they find those first principles inexhausted, inexhaustible? or is it always to deeper doctrines that they turn, as though it were only when quite out of their depth, that they gain a resting-place for the soul? I admire, I greatly admire, the picture of a Christian, as furnished by the prophetic sketch of the Jews in our text! He is a man who is never weary of hearing of the way to Zion, though his face is towards the heavenly city, and he may perhaps already behold its battlements on the horizon. I know not how far the exiles had advanced when they might first be described by the prediction before us. But there is nothing to limit the prediction to one point rather than to another of the journey. For anything we know, those blue hills in the distance may be the mountains which are "round about Jerusalem," and the waters which they are crossing may

have flowed by its ruined walls; and yet, as though they had but just quitted Babylon, the wanderers are asking the way, loving to be told what they know, and delighting to hear, though not needing to be taught.

It is thus with the believer. What was glad news to him at the beginning, is glad news to him to the end: the prescribed way to safety, through repentance and faith, cannot be exhibited without fixing his attention, exciting his gratitude, and animating his hope. Let him be even on the border of the land, let him be even on the brink of the Jordan, and nothing will accord better with his feelings, nothing will more minister to his peace, than discourse, not on the New Jerusalem itself, but on the path by which it must be reached. The minister stands by a dying Christian, that, in the hour of dissolution, he may whisper words of comfort. And what hath he spoken of, that there is so bright a smile on the cheek of the sufferer, that the sunken eye is suddenly lit up as though with fire from above? Surely, say the bystanders, he hath spoken of the diadem, and the white robe, and the golden harp, of the palaces of immortality, and of the raptures of those who have cast off the burden of the flesh. Ah, no!—he hath spoken as he would have done to the young inquirer in religion. He hath spoken of the Divine love in finding a ransom: he hath spoken of the blood of Christ as cleansing from all sin: he hath spoken of the intercession of Christ as securing all blessing. And if surprise be expressed that such elementary discourse should be cheering to a man as he almost entered heaven, the minister will have only to reply, that the true believer is one, who, to the very end, resembles the Jews as they journeyed from Babylon to Canaan, and who asked “the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward.”

But there is yet one more particular on which we wish to insist; not that we think that we shall then have exhausted the text; but that what we have still to advance is of so practical a character, that we could not be justified in its omission. We would direct your attention to what we may call the honesty of purpose displayed by the Jews, and hold it up for imitation to all who profess to be seeking the kingdom of God.

The Jew had his face turned towards Zion, whilst he was inquiring the road: if he did not know the precise path, he knew the direction in which the city lay; and he was looking in the direction, when he asked what way he should take. He might have been looking in another direction: his eye might have been to the city which he had to quit, and not to that to which he had to go; and then there would have been good reason to suspect that he preferred the remaining in Babylon, though he professed a desire to remove to Jerusalem. But as his face was already Zionwards, he gave evidence of being in earnest: he had done as much as he could do with his amount of information, and there could be no doubt that he was sincere in his inquiry for more.

We have a right to require and expect a similar conduct from all those who ask of us the way to heaven. There is such a thing as asking the way to Zion with the face towards Babylon; and if there be this dissimulation—for no milder word will express the precise truth—in vain will the preacher point out the road, and urge the traveller to decision and dispatch. We fear it to be true of numbers amongst you, that they ask the way to heaven, but keep looking towards the world. What interpretation are we to put upon your appearance Sabbath after Sabbath in the sanctuary of God, if not that it professes a wish for instruction, a desire to be informed how, as immortal creatures, you may escape lasting misery, and secure lasting happiness? We cannot, in the judgment of charity, put a less favorable construction on your coming up to God's house; we cannot regard it as a mere compliance with custom, or as a mode of passing away time, which might otherwise hang heavy on your hands. Every man who frequents the public ordinances of the Church is certainly to be considered as thereby, if by nothing else, asking of those whom God hath set as guides to the wandering, by what way he may reach the kingdom of heaven.

But it is in vain that the answer is continually given, and that, on successive opportunities, the minister of Christ holds forth the chart, and delineates the path. And the great reason of this is, that there is no honesty of purpose in the

inquirer, no real intention of acting on the information which he professes to want. His face is towards the world at the very moment that, with all the show of a traveller towards Zion, he is making inquiries as to a path and conveyance. And we would have you distinctly understand, that there is a certain part which the unconverted man has to perform if he hope for conversion; and that whilst this is undone, he has no right to look for the visitations of grace. It may not be in his power to find for himself the pathway of life; still less to take a step on that pathway when found. But he may ascertain the direction in which Zion lies, and he may be looking in that direction, if not advancing. It is quite idle to say that he knows not the direction: he knows it to be the exact opposite to that in which he naturally looks; to turn his eyes from the world is, as he must be thoroughly aware, to turn them towards them.

And we expect this from every one of you who, in any shape, puts the inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" We expect him to be an imitator of the Jews who, if they asked the way to Zion, asked it with "their faces thitherward." What mean you by coming to God's house, not merely with your affections set on earthly things, but without an effort to disengage them? with no intention of entering on a course of labor and self-denial, if such should be prescribed? but rather with the secret determination of persevering a while longer in courses which you know to be wrong? What mean you by this hypocrisy, this double dealing? What mean you by this imitation of Lot's wife, who, if she had her foot towards Zoar, had her face towards Sodom? Show that you are in earnest by the direction in which you look; otherwise it is in vain to ask guidance as to the way in which to walk. The man who is in earnest will set himself at once to the turning his back on what conscience tells him to be wrong, or the Bible declares to be offensive to God. He will make it his business to forsake pursuits or associates, however agreeable, which draw him to the visible world, and to enter upon duties whose distinct tendency is towards the invisible. And this, at the least, is the setting his face heavenwards, a preliminary, as we are

bold to affirm, to his being enabled to direct his course heavenwards.

For it is an indisputable rule in the dealings of God, to give more grace in proportion as that already given is improved. He hath given strength to turn the eye—turn it, or never look for strength to move the foot. And if you would know whether it be an indifferent thing, that you continue asking the way to heaven with your face towards the world, you have only to refer to the writings of Ezekiel, where God Himself expresses his sense of the duplicity. "Every one of the house of Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to inquire of him concerning me, I the Lord will answer him by myself, and I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb." The case here supposed is precisely that which we are forced to regard as frequent amongst ourselves, the case of a man who, with his heart full of the idols of the world, with the stumbling-block of his iniquity put "before his face,"—so far is he from any effort to put it behind his back,—comes to inquire of the prophet concerning God, as though he wished to know how his favor might be gained. And God takes upon Himself the giving him his answer, an answer expressive of singular indignation, and more than common vengeance. That man is to be made "a sign and a proverb," a sign, as was the wife of Lot, to whom we have already referred, who was turned into a pillar of salt, that the wavering and hypocritical of all after-ages might be admonished and warned.

We can, therefore, but urge on you the taking heed how you come to inquire of the prophet, with no sincere purpose of acting on his directions. See to it that ye turn your face towards heaven; for this is in the power of all of you, through those workings of God's Spirit, of which every breast is the scene. Ye cannot turn the heart, but ye can turn the face. Ye can turn the back to the world, which is to turn the face towards heaven; and it is God's ordinary course to give the new heart to those who prove that they desire it, by looking away from all which the old

heart is prone to love and prefer. Then inquire the way to heaven; then, when your sincerity is proved, and you have shown, by your striving to obey God up to the measure of your knowledge and ability, that you would improve a greater measure if mercifully vouchsafed.

Thus will you be doing as did the children of Judah: and you shall find that, directed as they were into the right, though perhaps a rough path, you shall reach at length the land which God promised to your fathers, and sit down delightedly in the long-lost inheritance.

SERMON VIII.

THE BIRD'S NEST.

"If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, whether they be young ones, or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young; but thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, and take the young to thee; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days."—DEUTERONOMY xxii. 6, 7.

The question of St. Paul, after quoting a precept from the law as to not muzzling the ox when it treadeth out the corn, will here naturally recur to your minds, "Doth God take care for oxen?" On hearing our text, almost every one will be disposed to exclaim, "Doth God take care for birds?" Not that the question is meant to convey any doubt as to the Divine care for the inferior creation. We know that God "feedeth the young ravens that call upon him," and that, though five sparrows are sold for two farthings, "not one of them is forgotten before God." But when St. Paul proposes his question in regard of oxen, it is not to insinuate that it was beneath God to take care of oxen, or that the precept, which he quotes, was not designed to have a literal application. What he wishes to have understood, is simply, that the law had other and higher ends in view, besides the mere securing for the laboring ox a share in the produce of his labors. He instructs us that such a precept was meant to have a figurative, or symbolical, as well as a literal interpretation; that, whilst, in obedience to it, the ox

was not to be muzzled when treading out the corn, in further obedience, a due maintenance was to be afforded to the preachers of the Gospel. "Doth God take care for oxen? or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes no doubt this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope, and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope."

In thus amplifying a precept of the law, St. Paul may be said to have furnished a general rule as to the mode in which similar precepts should be interpreted and applied. We are not to regard them as having to do merely with the specific case to which the words address themselves: we are rather to search for the principle involved in the law, or on which the law is founded; to examine in what other cases the same principle will hold good; and to conclude, that, in every such case, the law was intended to be equally binding.

It is thus that we shall endeavor to proceed with that very peculiar law which we have taken as our present subject of discourse. We are very much struck with this law, not because it has

to do with a matter apparently trifling, and unworthy to be the object of Divine legislation, but because there is annexed to it the same promise as to commandments of the highest import and requirement. For you will observe that length of days, the very blessing which was to flow from giving to parents the honor prescribed by the fifth commandment, is held forth as a recompense to obedience in this matter of a bird and her nest. "That it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days." The commandment may have to do with a trivial thing; but it is evident enough that it cannot be a trivial commandment: indeed, no commandment can be which proceeds from God, because what is indifferent, or unimportant, so long as it is not the subject of a command, changes its whole character the moment that it is.

But, apart from this general consideration, on which we may find occasion hereafter to insist, the mere circumstance that the prolongation of life is set forth as the result of obedience, should satisfy you that the precept before us is not to be passed over as requiring little notice, but should rather be studied as fraught with instruction, conveying, like that expounded by St. Paul, figurative lessons of the very widest application. Dismiss, then, the thought which, not unnaturally, may have been excited by the first announcement of the text, the thought of there being almost something to provoke a smile in a bird's nest giving subject for a sermon. Let us endeavor to ascertain on what principles the precept before us is founded, what dispositions it inculcates and cherishes; and we shall find that there is no cause for surprise, in the annexment of a promise of long life to obedience to the direction, "If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, thou shalt not take the dam with the young."

Now you will see at once, that, had the precept been of a more stringent character, it might, in some sense, have been more easily vindicated and explained. Had it forbidden altogether the meddling with the nest, had it required that not only should the mother-bird be let go, but that neither the young birds, nor the eggs, should be taken, it would at once have been said that God was graciously protecting the inferior crea-

tion, and forbidding man to act towards them with any kind of cruelty. But the precept permits the taking the nest: it does not even hint that it might be better to let the nest alone: it simply confines itself to protecting the parent-bird, and thus allows, if it does not actually direct, what may be thought an inhuman thing, the carrying off the young to the manifest disappointment and pain of the mother.

It should not however be unobserved, that the precept does not touch the case in which there is an actual looking for the nest. It is not a direction as to what should be done, if a nest were found after diligent search; but only as to what should be done, if a nest were found by mere chance or accident. You will observe how the precept is introduced, "If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground." The nest was to be in some exposed situation, where it could not well be overlooked; and this circumstance may have had to do with the construction of the commandment.—Without pretending to argue that God would have forbidden the searching for the nest, it is highly probable that there was something significant in this direction as to taking the nest, in the particular case when that nest had been unwisely placed. We are sure, from various testimonies of Scripture, that God has designed to instruct us in and through the inferior creation, the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field, being often appealed to when men have to be taught and admonished. And we know not, therefore, that there can be any thing far-fetched in supposing, that, by sanctioning a sort of injury to the bird, which had built its nest in an insecure place, God meant to teach us, that, if we will not take due precautions for our own safety, we are not to expect the shield of his protection. There would hardly have been such emphasis laid on the nest's "chancing to be in the way," if it had not been designed that we should observe how unwisely the nest had been placed, and draw some inference as to the need of prudence on our own part, if we hope to experience the guardianship of God.

This, however, only goes to the explaining why there was any permission for taking the nest, when you might

rather have expected, that, had God legislated on such a matter at all, it would have been for the protection of the young birds as well as of the old. But now, as to the permission itself, we may throw together some general considerations which go to the showing that there was great significance in the allowing that only the young should be taken, whilst the old were let go. Were not the Israelites hereby taught to be moderate in their desires? The first impulse would be to seize the old bird with the young, and thus secure as much as possible. But this is nothing better than the impulse of covetousness; and it was like giving a lesson against covetousness, a lesson so constructed as to be capable of being reproduced in great variety of circumstances, when the finder of a prize, who might fancy himself at liberty to appropriate the whole, was required to content himself with a part. And, over and above the lesson against covetousness, there was also in the precept a lesson against recklessness or waste. For to have taken possession of the old bird together with the young, would have been to have destroyed, in that case, the further multiplication of the kind: in certain states of the animal creation, it would have been almost tantamount to the extinguishing a species; and in every state it was doing as much as, at the moment, could be done towards preventing a species from increasing on the earth.

The precept set itself against this improvident and wasteful appropriation of God's creatures. It required man, whilst supplying his present wants, to have due regard to his future; yea, and to the wants of others, as well as to his own: it virtually said to him, Take what is enough for thee to-day, in taking the nest; but the old bird may build another nest, which may be useful to another, or to thyself another day; therefore, "thou shalt in any wise let the dam go." We do not of course mean that such a lesson was to hold good merely in the particular instance. On the contrary, there is a general principle thus shown to be involved in the precept; and we are supposing that the precept was constructed for the purpose of embodying and enforcing such principles. There is a reckless disposition in many, a profuse expenditure of whatsoever they can

lay hands on, little regard being had to future wants, and the very means of supplying them being often improvidently and unnecessarily anticipated. Does not the precept before us distinctly condemn all such prodigality, extravagance, and want of due forethought? You may apply the principle to a hundred cases. Whenever men live upon the capital, when the interest would suffice; whenever they recklessly consume all their earnings, though those earnings might enable them to lay something by; when, so long as, by eager grasping, they can secure what they like for themselves, they are utterly indifferent as to interfering with the supplies and enjoyments of others—in every such case, they are violating the precept before us; they are taking the old bird with the young; as, on the other hand, by treating as a sin any thing like wastefulness, by a prudent management of the gifts and mercies of God, by such a wise husbandry of resources as shall prove a consciousness that the Divine liberality in place of sanctioning extravagance, should be a motive to economy, they may be said to be virtually obeying the precept; they are taking the young, but letting the dam go.

And though these are but general considerations, which can hardly be said to carry you into the interior of the commandment, so as to show you why long life should be annexed to obedience, they may yet suffice to divest that commandment of all the air of trivial legislation with which you might be ready, on its first announcement, to consider it invested. True, it is only about a bird's nest that the ever-living God is here delivering a law. But if there be couched in that law denunciations alike of the covetous and the spendthrift, so that every one, who studied its spirit, would find himself directed to a right use of God's creatures, surely enough has already been said to do away all surprise at finding in the Jewish code such a direction as this, "If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way, thou shalt in any wise take to thee the young, and let the dam go."

But now let us look more narrowly into the reasons of the precept: we shall probably find, if we examine the peculiarities of the case, that the com-

mandment before us has a yet more direct and extensive application. It could only be, you will observe, the attachment of the mother-bird to its young, which, for the most part, would put it in the power of the finder of the nest to take both together. If the mother-bird cared only for her own safety, if she were indifferent to her offspring, she would take flight in any possible danger, and leave the inmates of the nest a prey to any enemy. But her powerful affection towards her defenceless little ones keeps her close to them, makes her hover about them when threatened with danger, and even urges her to resist an assailant, whom, under any other circumstances, she would have fled from precipitately. So that, except in some rare instances, it is nothing but parental affection which would put it in man's power to take the old with the young: the young cannot make their escape, but the mother-bird might; and the mother-bird would, if she were not the mother-bird, and moved by the strongest instinct to stay with her brood.

And when you bring this circumstance into the account, you can hardly doubt that one great reason why God protected the mother-bird by an express commandment, was, that He might point out the excellence of parental affection, and teach us that we were not to take advantage of such an affection, in order to any injury to the parties who displayed it. He would not have the mother-bird injured, when it was only her affection as a mother which gave the opportunity of injuring her. Under other circumstances, this mother-bird might be taken; there was no law against that; but whensoever it was her attachment to her young which exposed her to the being taken, then God interposed with a distinct prohibition, and commanded that she should not be taken. Surely it may justly be said that God hereby threw a kind of sacredness around parental affection, and delivered moreover a solemn injunction against our ever making use of the power, which such an affection may give us, to work mischief to the party by whom it is displayed. This is one of the most important of the points of view under which the text can be considered; and we shall strive, by some general illustrations, to

put you well in possession of the precise facts of the case.

You must be all quite aware, that the affection which one party bears to another, may be taken advantage of, and that, too, to his manifest detriment. For example, circumstances place the child of another in your power; you are about to oppress or ill use that child: the parent entreats: you agree to release the child, but only on conditions with which the parent would never have complied, had it not been for the strong pleadings of natural affection—what do you do in such a case but make use of a power, derived solely from the parent's love, to effect the parent's injury? you seize, so to speak, the mother-bird, when it is only her being the mother-bird which has given you the opportunity of seizure.

This is a precise case in point; but you may say that it is one only of imaginary occurrence, and not at all likely. We admit that. But what we want is, that you should get hold of the principle involved in the text, and you will then quickly see how it works in great variety of cases. And you get hold of the principle by observing such a case as has just been supposed. There the opportunity of injuring a parent is furnished through that parent's affection for a child; and the precept before us is violated, inasmuch as the affection, in place of serving as a shield to the parent, is taken advantage of for the doing him a mischief.

But evidently the involved principle is of very wide application. A parent may take improper advantage of a child's love, a child of a parent's. A parent may work on the affections of a child, urging the child, by the love which he bears to a father or mother, to do something wrong, something against which conscience remonstrates: this is a case in point; this is a case in which improper advantage is taken of affection, or injurious use is made of a power, which, as in the case of the bird and her young, nothing but strong affection has originated. Suppose, for instance, the child is of a serious and religious turn of mind, averse from scenes of frivolity and dissipation, and the parent wishes to take the child into such scenes, and makes the child's accompanying him a test of filial attachment; why, that parent is working the

child's injury through the child's affection; the very thing which is virtually forbidden by the precept before us.

On the other hand, a child may make an improper use of a parent's affection. Wishing for something which the parent, as he knows, disapproves and thinks 'wrong, some gratification, indulgence, amusement, he may work upon the parent's love; he may appeal to that love, calculating that it will not be able to resist his importunity. This is the same thing again: here a wrong is attempted towards the parent, (for a wrong is done by an inducement to do wrong,) and it is only the affection of the parent which gives the opportunity of making the attempt.

Or, to pass out of the particular case of parents and children, all the attachments which exist in life, and bind together the various members of society, may be taken advantage of for some injurious purpose, inasmuch as they will open a door of assault where otherwise the party would be quite beyond reach. The husband may use the influence given him by the affection of the wife, to induce her to comply with his wishes in things which she feels, or suspects to be wrong. The wife may make precisely the same use of the affection of her husband: she may work upon him through that affection; endeavoring to persuade him into courses from which he is repugnant, and which, had it not been for his affection, she would have had no opportunity, or at least no likelihood, of prevailing on him to adopt.

It is exactly the same amongst brothers and sisters, amongst friends and acquaintances. Any one relation may take advantage of another, and work, through that affection, the injury of the party by whom it is entertained. The parent bird, clinging to the nest, is but an example how binding the natural affections may be, and how these affections may expose to dangers which, but for them, would never be incurred. And the express direction to let go the parent bird, has only to be expanded by expanding the principle which it palpably involves, and you have a general charge as to carefulness in using the power which is derived to you from the affections of others. God endowed us with these affections, with the gracious purpose of smoothing and sweetening life, and of

furnishing an instrumentality through which Himself might be appreciated, and apprehended as our chief good. And it is a mighty power, for injuring, or for benefiting, which is conferred by these affections. You can hardly overrate the influence which, in the several relations of life, is possessed by those who are the objects of these affections, an influence which would wholly disappear, were the affections withdrawn. And God would have us shun, with the greatest possible solicitude, the making an ungenerous use of this influence, turning it to the injury of the party whose affection has created it. Parents are to be specially careful what advantage they take of filial love, and children, what advantage they take of parental. Each must shun, as they would the desecration of what is holy, and the perpetrating what is base, the working on the other, against the dictates of that other's conscience, through the medium of the affections. If the mother-bird is to be taken, at least let it not be whilst sitting on the nest. It is bad enough to bring a friend, or relation, into moral danger, to make him the captive of sin: it is worse, it is like what is elsewhere denounced in Scripture, the seething a kid in its mother's milk, to use his attachment to accelerate his ruin.

Consider then, all of you, whatever the special ties which associate you with others, that you commit a signal sin, a sin signally displeasing to God from its ungenerous, or, rather, unnatural character, when, in place of using the influence which affection confers, to the making others more devoted to religion, you employ it on the keeping them in bondage to Satan, or on bringing them back after they had broken the chain. You thought that our text had to do with a very trivial matter; you were almost ready to smile that there should be a law about birds' nests. But now observe where we have found that nest: we have found it amid the warmest charities of the heart, builded of those tender and glowing affections, which you have only to destroy, and you make earth a desert. And because there is such a nest, a nest brooded upon by bright rich wings, which even danger cannot provoke into flight, you possess a power of doing an injury; you may help to imprison an immortal soul, a soul,

which, had it not been thus detained, would have sprung upwards, and reached "the glorious liberty of the children of God." O foul, flagitious use of a power bestowed by an affection which should have secured, as it deserved, most generous treatment! O wretched parents, who, knowing the devoted attachment of children, work through that attachment to the persuading them to seek happiness in the world! O wretched children, who, calculating on the fondness of parents, entreat permission to adventure into scenes of temptation! O wretched kinsfolk, wretched friends, who, knowing themselves beloved, would urge those who love them to commence, or continue, some unrighteous practice! Again we say, if ye will seethe the kid, at least seethe it not in its mother's milk. If you must help to keep others in sin, let it not be through the power which their affection communicates. This is aggravating the guilt: this is making the injury more atrocious: this is abusing a high trust, gaining a heart that you may pierce it, a fountain that you may poison it. And this is what is so forcibly, though figuratively, denounced by the precept of our text, a precept which says nothing against seizing the parent bird, when it is not her affection for her brood which puts her in your power, but which, in that case, is most decisive against her being made prisoner: "Thou shalt not take the dam with the young; thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days."

But our text has yet to be considered under another point of view. We have hitherto contended, that, though it be apparently an insignificant matter with which the commandment before us is concerned, principles are involved of a high order, and a wide application, so that there is no reason for surprise at finding long life promised as the reward of obedience. But we will now assume the Jews' opinion to have been correct: they were wont to say of this commandment, that it was the least amongst the commandments of Moses. Admit it to have been so; admit it to have been a very trifling thing which was enjoined, and that no satisfactory reason can be given why the Divine lawgiver should have made a specific enactment as to

such a matter as a bird's nest. There are other commandments in the law, for which it might be hard to assign any sufficient reason, save and except that it was God's pleasure to ordain them. There may have been some figurative, or symbolical, meaning; but perhaps it is as well to suppose and confess that God merely sought to put obedience to the proof, when He said, "Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woolen and linen together;" or, "Thou shalt make thee fringes upon the four quarters of thy vesture, wherewith thou coverest thyself."

Yet, admitting that there are such things as commandments about trifles, admitting also that the commandment before us may be reckoned in the number, is there any cause for wonder that such a blessing as long life should be promised by way of recompense to obedience? My brethren, there is a greater trial of obedience, in a commandment of which we cannot see the reasons, than in another of which we can. In the former case, we do, or forbear, a thing, simply because God hath enjoined, or forbidden, it; in the latter, we are not moved purely by the divinity of the precept, we are actuated also by a sense of its propriety. A commandment which forbids murder, is a commandment syllabled by conscience, as well as delivered by God: he who lifts his hand to slay another, does as much violence to an irrepensible dictate from within, as to an indelible record from without. But a commandment which forbids the seizing a bird whilst sitting on the nest, is a commandment which takes its force purely from being a commandment: you might have done the thing innocently, had there been no express prohibition; and, therefore, it is only there being a prohibition which makes the doing it wrong. And surely, it may be a greater effort of obedience, to obey in some little thing, where there is no other reason but that God hath required it, than to obey in some great thing, where our own sense of what is right urges to compliance.

The tendency of our minds is to the asking a reason for every thing. It is so with doctrines. God reveals to us a truth: but we are not content to take it on the authority of revelation; we are for asking with Nicodemus, "How can

these things be?" we want to be able to explain the doctrine, and thus to find grounds for our belief, over and above the simple word of the Lord. But undoubtedly it is a higher, and must be a more acceptable, exercise of faith, when we receive a truth, because revealed, than when, because, besides being revealed, we can so arrange it that it commends itself to our reason.

It is the same with commandments. God enjoins a certain thing: but we can hardly bring ourselves to obey, simply because He has enjoined it. We have our inquiries to urge—why has He enjoined it? if it be an indifferent thing, we want to know why He should have made it the subject of a law? why not have let it alone? Why not? Because, we may venture to reply, He wishes to test the principle of obedience: He wishes to see whether his will and his word are sufficient for us. In order to this, He must legislate upon things which in themselves are indifferent, neither morally good nor morally bad: He must not confine laws to such matters as robbing a neighbor's house, on which conscience is urgent; He must extend them to such matters as taking a bird's nest, on which conscience is silent.

It is the same as with a child. He is walking in a stranger's garden, and you forbid his picking fruit: he knows that the fruit is not his, and therefore feels a reason for the prohibition. But he is walking on a common, and you forbid his picking wild flowers: he knows that no one has property in these flowers, and therefore he cannot see any reason for your prohibition. Suppose him however to obey in both cases, abstaining alike from the flowers and the fruit, in which case does he show most of the principle of obedience, most of respect for your authority and of submission to your will? Surely, when he does not touch the flowers, which he sees no reason for not touching, rather than when he does not gather the fruit, which he feels that he can have no right to gather.

It is exactly the same with God and ourselves. He may forbid things which we should have felt to be wrong, even had they not been forbidden: He may forbid things which we should not have felt wrong, nay, which would not have been wrong, unless He had forbidden them. But in which case is our obe-

dience most put to the proof? not surely as to the thing criminal even without a commandment: but as to the thing indifferent till there was a commandment. God might have made it the test of Adam's obedience that he should not kill Eve—a crime from which he would have instinctively revolted: but it was a much greater trial that he should not eat of a particular fruit; for eating it was no crime till he was told not to eat it.

And we may justly believe that, in constructing the Jewish code, God interspersed laws for which there was no apparent reason with others for which there was palpable, on purpose that He might see whether his people would obey his word, simply because it was his word; whether they would wait to know why He commanded, or be satisfied with ascertaining what He commanded. But upon this, which is manifestly the correct view of obedience, it is to inconsiderable precepts, precepts as to inconsiderable things, rather than to those which have to do with felt and undeniable duties, that we might expect to find annexed a promise of reward. The obedience which shows most of the readiness to obey, must be the obedience which God most approves: and if there be shown more of readiness to obey, where the thing done would have been indifferent, than where it would have been criminal without express command, we can have no difficulty in settling that the recompense of long life was even more to be looked for when the precept had to do with a trifle than when with the mightiest obligation. Look at the Jewish law—"Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless,"—a noble commandment, to whose fitness every heart responds. "If a bird's nest chance to be before thee, thou shalt not take the dam with the young,"—a trivial commandment, for which it is perhaps hard to assign any reason. Yet it is to the latter, the trivial, and not to the former, the noble, that the words are added, "That it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days." Do ye wonder at this? Nay, it is not that it is a better thing in itself to let the parent bird go, than to minister justice to the stranger and the fatherless: but that it is often harder to obey in

trifles, where we looked to have been left at liberty, than in great things, as to whose fitness there has never been a doubt.

By such laws, with such sanctions, God may be said to have consecrated trifles; to have taught us that trifles may be the best tests of principles; that our religion may be better proved by the habitual giving up of our own wills in common and every-day things, than by occasional and opulent sacrifices; that it is a greater effort of piety, marking more the depth of our reverence for the word of the Almighty, to make conscience of little duties which are made duties only by that word, than to give ourselves to high tasks, to which we are summoned by the wants of the world and the voice of the Church. It may be easier, it may require less of that simple, unquestioning obedience in which God delights, to attack superstition on its throne, than to let the bird fly from its nest. Be careful, then, in religion how you make trifles of trifles. Stay not to find out why God has forbidden this or that indulgence, why He will not let you do what seems unimportant, why He prescribes rules where He might, as it appears, have safely left you to yourselves. Obey because there is a command, ay, though it be only the faintest expression of the Divinest will; Abraham was to slay Isaac, because God commanded it; you are to let go the bird, because God commands it. This is the obedience which God approves; this is the obedience which God will recompense; obedience, not without a reason, but with no reason except the Divine bidding. Oh! you have only more and more to show me that it was really unimportant, whether or not the old bird were taken with the young, that there could have been no harm in securing both at once, and you more and more explain why a promise of prosperity should be annexed to the commandment, "Thou shalt not take the dam with the young; thou shalt in any wise take the young to thee, and let the dam go."

There is neither space nor need for many concluding observations. Our subject perhaps looked to you unpro-

missing at the first, and you fancied that little material of edification could be found in such a precept as we took for our text. Yet the precept has furnished us with important practical lessons, lessons against covetousness, against cruelty, against extravagance, against an undue use of the power given us by the affections of others, against the making little in religion of little commandments and little duties. What a wonderful book is the Bible, that its every verse should comprehend so much, single sayings being as mines of truth, into which if you patiently dig, you find stores of instruction and yet leave more than you find!

Be very careful in reading Scripture, whether the Old Testament or the New, that you pass not over parts, as though they might be unimportant. Neither be always content with the primary meaning, and the obvious application. Scripture has a hidden sense as well as an open; and to them who search for it with prayer, many a beautiful import is disclosed, which would never be suspected by the careless or cursory observer. A verse is often like the nest on which the parent bird broods: when the parent bird is let go, there are young birds within, each of which has only to be cherished and watched, and it will be "covered with silver wings, and her feathers like gold."

With other lessons, then, carry away this as to the depth and comprehensiveness of Scripture. Read the Bible yourselves, and teach your children to read it, as a book that should be pondered, not hurried over; a book, so to speak, that may be better read by lines than by chapters. Ay, your children—one's home is as a nest; Job, when all was smiling around him, reports of himself, "Then I said, I shall die in my nest." It is a nest, a nest exposed to many rude invasions. The parent bird cannot always tarry with the young; but, when dismissed to wing its own flight upwards, that parent bird may leave its little ones to a better guardianship, and anticipate a day when they too shall soar to brighter regions, and find a resting-place in that tree of life which is Christ Himself.

SERMON IX.

ANGELS OUR GUARDIANS IN TRIFLES.

“They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.”—PSALM xci. 12.

The preceding verse is, “For He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” You will remember that, when Satan had placed our blessed Lord on the pinnacle of the Temple, it was with these two verses that he backed his temptation that He should cast Himself down, and obtain, through a useless and ostentatious miracle, the homage of the crowd assembled for worship. But the devil misquoted the verses. He left out the words “in all thy ways;” thus representing the angelic guardianship as having no limitation; whereas the promise was evidently meant to apply only whilst there was adherence to the ways of duty—those alone being the ways which could be called “thy ways,” whether the passage were applied individually to the Messiah, or generally to the Church.

It has been inferred from this application of the passage by Satan, that the words were prophetic of Christ, and should be interpreted especially, if not exclusively, of a care or protection of which our Savior was the object. This inference, however, can hardly be sustained: as the devil could misquote, he could also misapply; and though it may be that, in its highest significance, this ninety-first Psalm has respect to the Messiah, there is nothing in its tone to give reason why it may not be taken to himself, by every true believer in “the Lord our righteousness.”

We shall assume throughout our discourse, that the Psalm is the property, so to speak, generally of the Church: it were to rob the members of some of

their choicest comfort to prove that it belonged exclusively to the Head. If Satan gained nothing by applying the Psalm to Christ, he would have gained much if it were thence to be concluded that it applied to none else.

But we wish also, as a preliminary matter, to make one or two observations on the translation adopted in the authorized version of our text. The verb which is used conveys the idea of something very violent, “lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” But it does not seem as if the original required us to suppose any thing very violent. The Hebrew word may be interpreted merely of such contact with a stone as would make you stumble, or put you in danger of falling; whereas dashing your foot implies extreme force, as though you were the subject of some unusual disaster or accident. You see that it makes a great difference in the passage, regarded as a promise to the righteous, which of the two turns we give it: we are always in danger of tripping over a stone; we are not always in danger of dashing the foot against a stone: so that you may be said to take the promise out of every-day life, and to confine it to extraordinary emergencies, when it is made to imply such violent collision as is not likely to occur in our common walks.

When the devil, indeed, used the text in the endeavor to persuade Christ to throw Himself headlong from the pinnacle of the Temple, it was literally the dashing the foot against a stone which might have been expected to occur: accordingly the word “dash” is

employed with great propriety by our translators, in giving the account of our blessed Savior's temptation. Yet it should be observed that even the Greek word, which is thus translated "dash," by no means conveys necessarily the idea of great force or violence. It is, for example, the very same word as is employed by our Lord in the eleventh chapter of St. John's gospel, where He speaks of the security of a man who walks by day, as compared with another who walks by night. "Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him." We need not say that something much less than dashing the foot against a stone, will cause a man to trip or stumble as he walks in a dark night. He can hardly "dash the foot" unless he be running; and Christ, at least, speaks only of his walking.

As to the Hebrew itself, our translators have not always made it convey the idea of what is violent. The same word occurs in the third chapter of the book of Proverbs, where you read, "Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble." We seem warranted, then, in saying that nothing more is intended in our text than that tripping or stumbling which may indeed occur through violent contact with some great impediment, which may also be occasioned by a mere pebble in our path, and when, too, we are proceeding at a leisurely pace. So that, for once, the Prayer Book version is probably the more accurate of the two: for this runs, "They shall bear thee in their hands, that thou hurt not thy foot against a stone." And with this agrees Bishop Horsley's version, "They shall bear thee up in their hands, that thou hit not thy foot against a stone." There is far less of the idea of violence in the hitting, than in the dashing the foot against a stone.

You will understand, as we proceed with our discourse, why we have been so anxious to divest the passage of the idea of violence. Not that we wish you to suppose that the promise does not include the case of dashing the foot; but we would have you aware that it includes cases where there is nothing of

this forcible collision, every case in which a man is in danger of stumbling, over however small an obstacle, and by however gentle a movement.

These are the necessary preliminaries to our discourse, the settling to whom the text may be applied, and the defining the precise import of its expressions. The text, you see, is to be applied generally to the Church, to the people of God, of every age and of every degree. The import of its expressions is that conveyed by the version in the Prayer Book, which makes them refer to an ordinary and every-day danger. These preliminaries having been adjusted, we have to endeavor to follow out the trains of thought which may be evolved from the assertion, that God gives his angels charge over the righteous, to bear them up in their hands, lest they hurt their foot against a stone.

Now the first thing which strikes one, and which we should wish to set vividly before you, is the contrast between the instrumentality employed, and the business upon which it is used. Let us look a little at what Scripture tells us of angels: we may not be able to understand much as to these glorious and powerful beings; for what is purely spiritual evades our present comprehension; but we cannot fail to learn that they are creatures far transcending ourselves in might and intelligence. They are represented as God's ministers, executing the orders of his Providence. They wait reverently in his presence, to receive the intimations of his will, and then pass, with the speed of lightning, through the universe, that they may accomplish whatsoever He hath purposed. Of vast number, for "the chariots of God," saith the Psalmist, "are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels," they are described in holy writ as "creatures of wonderful agility and swiftness of motion, therefore called cherubim, that is, winged creatures," and seraphim, or flames of fire, because of so strange a subtlety as to "penetrate into any kind of bodies, yea, insinuate themselves into, and affect, the very inward senses of men*." An angel, in and through a dream of the night, moved Joseph to take the young child and his

* Bishop Bull.

mother, and return out of Egypt. In like manner, an angel roused Peter from his sleep, led him past the keepers, and delivered him from the dungeon. That these angels are endowed with admirable efficacy and power, we learn from the invocation of David, "Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word;" and from the fearful history of the destruction of the hosts of the Assyrian, when, in a single night, and through the single agency of one of these celestial beings, "an hundred fourscore and five thousand" became "all dead corpses."

We know also of angels, that, "as immortal beings, they have no principle of corruption within themselves; as unalterable at least as the pure heaven where they dwell, they can never die or perish but by the hand of Him that first gave them being;"* for, speaking of "the children of the Resurrection," Christ hath said, "Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels."

And if these be only scattered and passing intimations of the nature and office of holy angels, they are, at least, sufficient to impress us with a sense of the greatness and gloriousness of these invisible beings; a sense which can but be confirmed and increased, when we consider what fallen angels have wrought; they being, according to the representations of Scripture, the grand antagonists of the Almighty Himself, and, though doomed to a certain destruction, yet able, for century after century, to keep the universe unbinged and disordered, not indeed to frustrate the Divine plans, but to oppose such obstacles to their completion as nothing short of Divine power could surmount. What angels are that have kept their first estate, we may infer in a measure from what is done in us and around us, by angels that have apostatized from God.

And when you have duly considered and collected what is made known to us as to angels, it cannot fail but that you will have a very lofty idea of these, the principalities and powers of the invisible world, and that you will expect to find them occupied with matters that

shall seem worthy their stupendous endowments. Believing that God will always proportion the means which He employs to the end which He proposes, you would conclude that the highest of created intelligences, such as the angels are to be accounted, must be employed only on what is dazzling and magnificent, on the carrying out the designs of the Almighty in and through the nobler combinations of cause and effect. And it might almost strike you as derogatory to the dignity of angels, that they should be represented in Scripture as "ministering spirits" to the heirs of salvation: you might almost imagine it beneath beings of endowment so far surpassing our own, that it should be a part, and, as it would seem, a main part of their office, to attend us on our passage through this troublesome world, and aid our endeavors to secure eternal life.

Yet there is nothing more clearly laid down in the Bible, than that angels are thus employed in waiting on the righteous: and when you come to think of the worth of the human soul, a worth which, if you can measure it by nothing else, you may judge in a degree by the price paid for its redemption, you will probably cease to be surprised, that not only is there "joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth," but that the celestial hosts marshal themselves for the guardianship of the believer, and use their vast power in promoting his good.

This, however, is removing the apparent contradiction to the lofty nature and sublime endowments of angels, by magnifying the employment, by arguing that it cannot be beneath any created intelligence to minister unto man for whom God's Son hath died. But if, over and above the general fact of angels being ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation, the Bible set forth angels as doing little, inconsiderable, things on behalf of man, interfering where there seems no scope for, or no need of, their vast power, discharging offices of the most trifling description, rendering services which can hardly be observed, and between which and their ability there is the greatest apparent disproportion, then, in all probability, your surprise will return, and you will again think the occupation derogatory to the beings so employed.

Yet such is the case: the scriptural

* Bishop Bull.

representation brings down the ministration of angels to what appears trivial and insignificant, in place of confining it to some great crisis in the history of the righteous. And it is this fact which is so forcibly set before us by our text. For what contrast can be greater? We direct you to the examining whatsoever is told you in the Bible as to the nature and endowments of angels. You cannot come from such an examination but with minds fraught with a persuasion of the greatness and gloriousness of the heavenly hosts, impressed with a sense of the vastness of their capacities, the splendor of their excellence, the majesty of their strength. And then we set you to the considering what occupation can be worthy of creatures thus pre-eminently illustrious; not allowing you indeed to indulge the excursions of imagination, which might rapidly hurry you into the invisible world, and there place before you the thrones and dominions of those whom God is pleased to honor as his instruments in the government of the universe; but confining you to the single truth, that angels have offices to perform to the Church, and that every righteous man is a subject of their ministrations. But, confined to this single truth, your minds will probably be busied with vast and magnificent enterprize: you know that there is going on, amongst other orders of being, a contest for ascendancy over man; and so soon therefore as told of good angels as ministering to the heirs of salvation, you will be likely to think of the war which they wage with Satan and his hosts, and to throw a dignity round their ministration to the meanest of Christ's people, by identifying it with championship in that portentous strife, which, for wise ends, God permits to agitate his empire.

But what will you say, when Scripture forces you away from this battle between the mighty powers of the invisible world, and obliges you to contemplate angels as, engaged with occupations which the most vivid fancy can scarce invest with any thing of splendor, nay, can scarce perhaps rescue from what is insignificant and degrading? Oh, it were almost startling, after hearing of the might and majesty of angels, to hear of creatures so lofty as having any ministrations to perform towards ourselves, children of corruption, and

crushed before the moth. But what shall we say when angels are introduced as bearing up the believer in their hands, not that he may be carried in safety over some vast ocean, not that he may be transported through hostile and menacing squadrons, not that, when exposed to some extraordinary danger, he may be conveyed to a place of refuge, but, as bearing him up in their arms, "lest at any time he hurt his foot against a stone?"

Now we thus bring out the great peculiarity, and, at the same time, the great beauty of the text, the contrast between the instrumentality which is employed, and the thing which is done. Angels, the topmost beings in creation, the radiant, the magnificent, the powerful—angels are represented as holding up a righteous man, lest some pebble in the path should make him trip, lest he hurt his foot against a stone. But you may be sure that we do not take pains to make you aware of this contrast merely because of its singularity or unexpectedness: we would not have drawn it out as we have done, and thus endeavored to gain for it a hold upon your minds, had we not believed that important truths were to be gathered from the assignment of what looks so trifling, the keeping a man from hurting his foot against a stone, to beings of such transcendent glory and strength as the Bible, in every part, attributes unto angels.

Let us now, therefore, see whether there is not much to be gathered, both for comfort and instruction, from a contrast which has only to be pointed out, and it must immediately be felt as every way remarkable. We would not indeed have it thought that the contrast is the solitary one of the kind, nor even perhaps that it is not exceeded in strangeness by others which may be observed in the Bible. Who that thinks of the greatness and stupendousness of God, and then asks himself what can be a fitting employment for God, does not find his mind turning, almost naturally, to stars and systems, whose stately movements have to be ordered? or to empires, whose rise and fall seem important enough for the attention of the universal Governor? or, if to individuals of our race, yet to the more eminent and distinguished, on whom commonwealths depend, and to these only at some spe-

cial times, when nothing less than Divine power can suffice for the extricating them from difficulty, or the delivering them from danger?

But how different are the representations of Scripture. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." God the doer, the wiping away tears the thing done—what a contrast! what apparent disproportion! Then the prayer of David, "Put thou my tears into thy bottle"—what a picture does it give of God! there is something which looks God-like in Isaiah's delineation, He "hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand;" but putting our tears into his bottle, if we had not found it in the Bible, we might not have dared to imagine it. Thus again, "Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness,"—what an image of Deity! what an occupation for Deity! it is hardly possible, with the mind fresh from the contemplation of the unwearied actings of God amid the awful grandeurs of creation, to realize the picture, yea, even to feel as if there were nothing unbecoming or irreverent in the picture, of God's making the bed of one of his sick servants.

The contrast, then, in our text between an agency so mighty as that of angels, and an act so inconsiderable as that of keeping a man from hurting his foot against a stone, is not the alone specimen of the kind, but rather one of a number which may all be presumed to enforce the same truths. And what we would have you observe of such a contrast, is, that it is the very minuteness, the seeming insignificance, of the thing done, which gives its chief worth to the promise in our text. For the doctrine of a special Providence is valuable in proportion as we extend it to what the world counts trifles, to things of everyday occurrence. If you confine, as many do, the doctrine of God's providence to great events, supposing that it is only on some extraordinary emergence, in some unusual danger or difficulty, that God may be thought to give attention to an individual or a family, then truly there is but little comfort in the doctrine; for life, with most men, is but a round of petty things; each day is the repetition of the preceding, the same simple duties, the same simple trials; and as to a great crisis, which may warrant a belief that Deity, too highly ex-

alted, or too busily occupied, to concern Himself with ordinary things, is interposing and observing, really most of us might pass year after year, proceeding from youth to manhood, and from manhood to old age, without being able to fix an occasion which might justify our supposing that the crisis had been reached.

But the scriptural doctrine of Divine providence is altogether different from what such a limitation would give. The scriptural doctrine makes nothing too little for the care, as nothing too great for the power, of God. The scriptural doctrine sets God before us as mindful of the fall of a sparrow, as well as of the decay of an empire; as numbering the hairs of our heads, as well as the years of our lives. Whether it be through his own immediate agency, or whether He employ the instrumentality of his creatures, God is represented in the Bible as giving the most accurate heed, the most patient and observant attention, to the every-day wants of the meanest amongst us; so that nothing happens, though of the most trivial description, to the most insignificant of our race, save in and through the Divine appointment or permission; and there is not the poor man, whom the rising sun wakens to the going forth to toil for his daily bread, who may not as distinctly assure himself of his carrying with him to his wearisome task the ever-watchful guardianship of the Almighty Maker of the heavens and the earth, as though he were the leader of armies, or the ruler of nations.

Blessed be God for a truth such as this. It should go home to every heart. It cannot fail to go home, wheresoever a sense exists of the uncertainty of life, of the exposure to accident, of the wheel within wheel in the most common-place occurrences, of that utter powerlessness of looking into the future, and providing for its contingencies, which attaches alike to the wisest of us and to the weakest. We are not only permitted, we are commanded, to cast all our care upon God, and that, too, on the very principle of his caring for us;—all our care—oh, that we might learn to keep no care to ourselves, to commit our least anxieties to God, to lean upon his assistance in the performance of our least duties, upon his strength in the endur-

ance of our least trials, upon his comforts for the soothing of our least sorrows. If we would not exclude God from any thing little, we should find Him with us in everything great. If we thought nothing beneath God, we should find nothing above Him. And the beauty, as we have said, of such passages as our text, lies, not in their enlisting on man's side the most magnificent instrumentality, but in their enlisting it for some apparently trivial and inconsiderable purpose. For to tell me of angels, the ministers whom God is pleased to employ for the carrying on his providential operations, as appointed to the attending my path in certain great emergencies or perplexities, there would comparatively be little or nothing of comfort in this; what I want is an every-day providence. I want a guardianship which will go with me to my every-day duties, which will be around me in my every-day trials, which shall attend me in the household, in the street, in my business, in my prayers, in my recreations; which I may be aware of as watchful where there is no apparent peril, and which I may be assured of as sufficient where there is the worst.

And such a guardianship is revealed to me, when the hosts of heaven are affirmed to be employed on the protecting me against the most trifling accident. Oh! it might not do much towards cheering and elevating the poor and unknown of the flock, or towards the daily, hourly upholding of such as have higher places to fill, to be told of angels as encamping, as they encamped about Elisha, crowding the mountain with chariots of fire and horses of fire, when the king of Syria sent a great host to take the man of God. It cannot be often, if ever, that there is anything parallel to this peril of the prophet. But it just brings the celestial armies, in all their powerfulness, into the scenes of ordinary life—in other words, it gives to the doctrine of a Divine providence all that extensiveness, that individuality, that applicability to the most inconsiderable events, as well as that adequacy to the most important, which we require, if the doctrine is to be of worth and of efficacy, at all times, to all ranks, and in all cases—to be told that God has commissioned angels, the mightiest of his creatures, to bear us

up in their hands, not lest we fall over a precipice, come beneath an avalanche, sink in a torrent, but lest at any time we hurt our foot against a stone.

We are far, however, from being content with this view of the passage. There is indeed something that is exquisitely soothing and encouraging in the thought that angels, as ministering spirits, are so mindful of us that they look to the very pebbles which might cause us to trip;—how can we be other than safe if we do but trust in the Lord, when there is such care for our safety that the highest of created beings sedulously remove the least impediments, or watch that we surmount them? But this proceeds on the supposition that the hurting the foot against a stone is a trivial thing. We have spoken of the contrast in the text as though it were matter of surprise, that such an instrumentality as that of angels should be employed to so insignificant an end as that of preventing the hurting the foot against a stone. But is it an insignificant end? Is there, after all, any want of keeping between the agency and the act, so that there is even the appearance of angels being unworthily employed, employed on what is beneath them, when engaged in bearing us up, lest at any time we hurt the foot against a stone?

Nay, the hurting the foot against a stone has often laid the foundation of fatal bodily disease: the injury which seemed too trifling to be worth notice has produced extreme sickness, and ended in death. Is it different in spiritual respects, in regard of the soul, to which the promise in our text must be specially applied? Not a jot. Or, if there be a difference, it is only that the peril to the soul from a slight injury is far greater than that to the body: the worst spiritual diseases might commonly be traced to inconsiderable beginnings. This, my brethren, is a fact worthy your closest attention: we want you now to argue, from angels bearing us in their hands, lest we hurt the foot against a stone, that the hurting the foot against a stone is no such trifle as it seems; and we are sure that, if you consider awhile, you will admit that the importance of the thing done every way warrants that angels should be employed on the doing it.

Let us fix your attention on a case of

lamentable frequency, that which came under the survey of St. Paul, when he had to say to members of the Galatian Church, "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" There is many a man who evinces, for a time, a stedfast attention to religion, walking with all care in the path of God's commandments, using appointed means of grace, and avoiding occasions of sin, but who, after a while, in the expressive language of Scripture, leaves his first love, declines from spirituality, and is dead, though he may yet have a name to live. But how does it commonly happen that such a man falls away from the struggle for salvation, and mingles with the multitude that walk the broad road? Is it ordinarily through some one powerful and undisguised assault that he is turned from the faith, or over one huge obstacle that he falls to rise not again! Not so. It is almost invariably through little things that such a man destroys his soul. He fails to take notice of little things, and they accumulate into great. He allows himself in little things, and they accumulate into great. He allows himself in little things, and thus forms a strong habit. He concedes in little things, and thus gradually gives up much; he relaxes in little things, and thus in time loosens every bond. Because it is a little thing, he counts it of little moment; utterly forgetting that millions are made up of units, that immensity is constituted of atoms. Because it is only a stone, a pebble, against which his foot strikes, he makes light of the hindrance; not caring that he is contracting a habit of stumbling, or not observing, that, whenever he trips, there must be some diminution in the speed with which he runs the way of God's commandments, and that, however slowly, these diminutions are certainly bringing him to a stand.

The astronomer tells us, that because they move in a resisting medium, which, perhaps, in a million of years, destroys the millionth part of their velocity, the heavenly bodies will at length cease from their mighty march. May not, then, the theologian assure us, that little roughnesses in the way, each retarding us, though in an imperceptible degree, will eventually destroy the onward movement, however vigorous and direct it may at one time have seemed? Would

to God that we could persuade you of the peril of little offences. We are not half as much afraid of your hurting the head against a rock, as of your hurting the foot against a stone. There is a sort of continued attrition, resulting from our necessary intercourse with the world, which of itself deadens the movements of the soul; there is moreover a continued temptation to yield in little points, under the notion of conciliating; to indulge in little things, to forego little strictnesses, to omit little duties; and all with the idea that what looks so slight cannot be of real moment. And by these littles, thousands, tens of thousands, perish. If they do not come actually and openly to a stand, they stumble and stumble on, getting more and more careless, nearer and nearer to indifference, lowering the Christian standards, suffering religion to be peeled away by inches, persuading themselves that they can spare without injury such inconsiderable bits, and not perceiving, that in stripping the bark, they stop the sap.

On the other hand, men become eminent in piety by giving heed to little things; grateful for the smallest good, watchful over the smallest error, fearful of the smallest sin, careful of the smallest truth. They become great, through counting nothing little but themselves; great in knowledge, through studying the least sentence, and treasuring the least fragment; great in faith, through noting God's hand in little incidents, and going to Him in little sorrows; great in holiness, through avoiding little faults, and being exact in little duties. They thought it no trifle to strike the foot against a stone, and therefore is their step so firm, and their port so erect, however rugged and difficult the path. And are not then angels worthily employed, when employed in bearing up the righteous, "lest at any time they hurt their foot against a stone?" If they are "ministering spirits," watchful of whatsoever may endanger our salvation, think not that it must be to things which seem to us great, that they give special heed; they know far better than ourselves, though even we may know it well if we will, that it is the little which, neglected, makes apostates; which, observed, makes apostles.

Then turn henceforward the text to

good account, as a warning against committing small sins, a motive to diligence in small duties. Learn, from what angels are intent to do for you, what you should be earnest in endeavoring to do for yourselves. Those glorious, though invisible, beings bestow not their vigilance and carefulness on what is unworthy so lofty an instrumentality. They would not give such earnest heed to pebbles in the way, if it were not that pebbles are what men stumble over till precipitated into perdition, or what they mount upon till elevated into excellence. And if it might make you feel as though it were only at some great crisis, under some extraordinary temptation, or confronted by more than common enemies, that you had need for anxiety, effort, and prayer, to be told of angels as attending you to ward off the thunderbolt, or chain the tempest, oh, let it teach you how easy a thing it is to lose the soul, from what insignificant beginnings may fatal disease rise, with what unwearied earnestness you should avoid disobeying God in trifles, conforming to the world in trifles, relaxing in duty in trifles, to be told that angels, creatures of surpassing splendor and might, are commissioned to bear us up in their hands, not lest at any time we rush into the lion's den, or fall from the mountain top, but "lest at any time we hurt the foot against a stone."

There is one other remark which ought to be made on our text, though it may perhaps be involved in those which have already been advanced. We have endeavored to show you, from the vast importance in religion of giving heed to little things, that is far enough from being derogatory to the dignity of angels, that they should be employed on keeping the righteous from hurting the foot against a stone. You cease to wonder that such instrumentality should be used, if it be a thing of such moment towards which it is directed. But you ought further to observe, that it must be a thing, not only of importance, but of difficulty; otherwise, it would hardly be represented as engaging, or occupying, the ministrations of angels. It can be no easy thing, this keeping the foot from being hurt against a stone, seeing that the highest of created beings are commissioned to effect it. Neither is it. The difficulty in religion is the taking

up the cross "daily," rather than the taking it up on some set occasion, and under extraordinary circumstances.—The serving God in little things, the carrying religious principle into all the details of life, the discipline of our tempers, the regulation of our speech, the domestic Christianity, the momentary sacrifices, the secret and unobserved self-denials; who, that knows any thing of the difficulties of piety, does not know that there is greater danger of his failing in these than in trials of apparently far higher cost, and harder endurance; if on no other account, yet because the very absence of what looks important, or arduous, is likely to throw him off his guard, make him careless or confident, and thereby almost insure defect or defeat?

It is not, comparatively, hard to put the armor on when the trumpet sounds; but it is, to keep the armor on when there is no alarm of battle. I am not likely to forget my need of Divine grace, and to fail to seek it by diligent prayer, when I am summoned to some unusual duty, or menaced with some unusual danger; but it is only too probable that I may lapse into formality, or forget my own insufficiency, when there is simply what is of every-day occurrence to be either done or endured. He who would not think of climbing a mountain in his own strength, may think of passing over a stone. If he feel that he must be borne up by angels for the one, he may fancy that he needs no such help for the other. And, in religion, things are difficult, not so much from what they are in themselves, as from the likelihood of their being attempted in a self-sufficient temper. That, after all, is the most arduous duty, which involves the most temptation to our undertaking it without prayer. At least, the duty in which there is the greatest probability of failure, is that in which there is the greatest probability of our making sure of success. The chief danger is surely not that, which, being palpable and menacing, puts us on our guard, and makes us array our defence; but rather that, which, being subtle and unobtrusive, is likely to be neglected, or met without due preparation.

Understand, therefore, and remember that there is great difficulty in little things. Not without reason are angels

represented as ministering to us in little things: supernatural assistance is needful for little things; I do not say, more so than for great; but the want of it is less likely to be felt; and in proportion as the want is less felt, the supply is less likely to be sought; and the stone will be a worse stumbling-block to the man who is not committing his way unto the Lord, than the rock to another whose every step is with prayer. Remember that daily duties and dangers, the little unevennesses which may ruffle a temper, the petty anxieties of common life,

the exercises of Christian principles in trifles, these are what may be likened to pebbles in the path. But make not light of them because they are as pebbles. Ask daily grace as you ask daily bread. Attempt not the least thing in your own strength. And let it assure you of the difficulty of what is little, and of your consequent need, in what is little, of the might of the Lord, that angels, the highest created agencies, have the office assigned them of bearing up the righteous, "lest at any time they hurt their foot against a stone."

SERMON X.

THE APPEARANCE OF FAILURE.

"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it"—HEBREWS iv. 1.

It is a great principle under the Christian dispensation, that "none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." We are "members one of another," so associated by intimate and indissoluble ties, that we ought never to consider our actions as having a bearing only on ourselves; we should rather regard them as likely to affect numbers, and sure to affect some, of our fellow men, to affect them in their eternal interests, and not only in their temporal.

It would seem to be upon this principle that St. Paul exhorts Timothy not to be "partaker of other men's sins." The setting a bad example, to say nothing of the giving bad advice, makes us "partakers of other men's sins:" other men may take lessons, or be encouraged in sinning, from observing what we do; and thus may we virtually sin in other persons, as well as in our own; yea, sin after death as well as through

life, leaving successors behind us whose sins may, in great measure, and with thorough justice, be charged upon us no less than on themselves.

It is upon the same principle that we are required in Scripture to consider what may be expedient, as well as what may be lawful. There may be many things which our Christian liberty permits us to do as individuals, but from which Christian expediency requires us to abstain, as members of a Christian society. Thus St. Paul declares that, if meat made his brother to offend, he would eat no meat whilst the world stood, lest he should make his brother to offend. The apostle well understood the liberty procured for him by Christ: he says distinctly, "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself." But, whilst certified that "all things were lawful for him," he was certified also

that "all things were not expedient:" he felt himself bound to consult for the good of those weaker brethren, who, not equally enlightened with himself, might have been staggered by his doing things which they were not themselves prepared to do; and whilst, had he been isolated and alone, he could have partaken, with a good conscience, indifferently of all kinds of food, he deemed it right, out of regard to the scruples of others, to put restraints upon his liberty, and to deny himself rather than place a stumbling-block in the way of the weak.

We have again the same principle, the principle that membership should influence actions, involved in a precept of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." There is not necessarily evil, wheresoever there is the "appearance of evil;" just as it were wrong to conclude that all which looks good is good. Yet the apostle requires us to abstain from the "appearance of evil," as well as from evil itself. Is this for our own sake? is it not also, if not altogether, for the sake of others? No doubt our own interest is concerned in the abstaining from the "appearance of evil," forasmuch as there is always great danger in approaching the limits of what is lawful: they who go as near sinning as they dare, often go much nearer than they suppose: the boundary between a virtue and its opposite vice is often shaded off so gradually, that the nicest discrimination would be puzzled to ascertain where the one terminates and the other begins; so that, if we venture into the misty region, in place of remaining where there is no obscurity or debate, no wonder if we transgress some commandment which, all the while, we may believe that we keep. Wherever there is certainly the "appearance of evil," and it is doubtful whether there is not also evil itself, we seem bound by the laws of Christian prudence, and out of due regard to our own spiritual safety, to act on the doubt, and abstain from the action. The soul ought never to be periled on a chance; and he who loves God in sincerity, will always prefer the denying himself where he might perhaps have lawfully indulged, to the indulging himself where he ought perhaps to have denied.

Hence there is wide scope for the precept of abstaining from "all appearance of evil," supposing it to have respect to ourselves alone, and our individual interests. Yet, nevertheless, the chief bearing of the injunction is probably on the interests of those with whom we are associated. Even if we are quite satisfied that there is only the "appearance of evil," and no evil itself, the precept, you see, requires our abstinence: when we could do the thing with a good conscience, without the least misgiving as to its being thoroughly lawful, notwithstanding any aspect to the contrary, we are still warned back from the action; and this must be because the action would be likely to give offence to others, who are not so clear-sighted as ourselves, might be unable to distinguish between the "appearance of evil" and evil itself. What has only the appearance to me, may have more than the appearance to another; and I am as much bound to take care that I wound not the conscience of one weaker than myself, as that I do no violence to the dictates of mine own.

There is something of a fine sound in advice which is often given, "Do what you know to be right, and care not what others may think;" but, after all, it is not universally, nor perhaps even generally, good and Christian advice. A Christian should consider the opinion of his fellow Christians: a Christian should have regard to the scruples of his fellow Christians: indeed he should do, without hesitation, whatsoever he feels to be right, if it be what God's law positively requires; all consequences are to be dared, rather than that God be disobeyed; but it ought not to be every thing to him that his own conscience approves, and nothing that the consciences of others may be grieved.

And thus does it follow, from various passages of Scripture, that Christians are so bound up the one with the other, and their interests so interwoven, that each should consider himself as acting for a multitude, and the individual always calculate with regard to the Church. Ask then yourselves, whether, as Christians, you are striving to act on the maxim of the apostle, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

Be not engrossed with securing your

own salvation; see to it that ye be not, at the same time, endangering the salvation of others. For be ye well assured that true piety is an enlarged and enlarging thing: it holds no terms with selfishness, but always deals with it as with an antagonist, who must destroy or be destroyed. If it be one great test of the genuineness of religion, Do I have respect to the good of my soul in the various plans and arrangements of life? depend upon it that it is not the less an accurate criterion by which to try the spiritual state, Do I think of what will do good to the souls of others? do I aim at so living that others may be influenced to the obeying the Gospel?

Now you will presently see why we have introduced our discourse with these remarks on Christians as being members one of another, and therefore bound to have respect, in all their actions, to the possible effects on their fellow Christians as well as on themselves. In the chapter preceding that which is opened by our text, St. Paul had been speaking of those Israelites, who though delivered by Moses from Egypt, never reached the promised land, but perished, through unbelief, in the wilderness. From this the apostle took occasion to warn Christians, that they might have made some progress towards Heaven, and still be in danger of missing its possession. They were to regard the case of the Israelites as but too possible an illustration of what might be their own: delivered from bondage, brought into the right way, and privileged with heavenly guidance, they might yet, through yielding to unbelief, come short of that glorious land whereof the Gospel had conveyed to them the promise.

And if this had been the whole tenor of our text, it would have afforded but little place for commentary, though much for private and personal meditation. Had the apostle exhorted Christians to fear lest any of them should come short of the promised rest, the exhortation, however valuable and important, would hardly have required the being illustrated or explained; the preacher's only business would have been the impressing it in its simplicity and power on his hearers, and the endeavoring to prevail on them to examine the grounds on which they might be hoping for admission into heaven. But you will observe

that St. Paul does not speak of "coming short," but of "seeming to come short," "lest any of you should seem to come short of it." We lay the emphasis on the word "seem," thinking that the stress of the passage is here; just as, in the precept on which we before spoke, "Abstain from all appearance of evil," the warning is against that which "seems" to be evil; it necessarily includes whatsoever both is, and appears to be, evil, but it includes also much which only appears to be, without actually being.

In like manner, the seeming to come short, and the actually coming short, are not necessarily the same; a man may have the appearance of failure, and nevertheless be successful. He "seems to come short" of the promised rest, who, in the judgment of his fellow-men, is deficient in those outward evidences by which they are wont to try the genuineness of religion. But surely, all the while, he may not actually "come short:" human judgment is fallible, and can in no case be guided by inspecting the heart, which alone can furnish grounds for certain decision; and, doubtless, many may be found in heaven at last, of whose entrance thither survivors could entertain nothing more than a charitable hope. And is it not enough, if we do not "come short?" why should we further concern ourselves as to the not "seeming to come short?" We might answer, as we did in regard of the "appearance of evil," that it is a dangerous thing to approach danger. He who "seems to come short" must almost necessarily be in some peril of failure; and where heaven is at stake, no wise man, if he could help it, would run the least risk. Besides, it can hardly be that he, who seems to others to come short, should possess decisive and scriptural evidences of his acceptance with God. He may indeed know himself better than others know him; neither is he at all bound to accept their judgment as determining his state; but still, as others decide from external evidence, and such evidence is of more weight than any internal persuasion, it is difficult to see how he, who seems to others to come short, as not letting his light shine brightly before men, can have a well-founded hope that he is not coming short, but is daily pressing "towards

the mark for the prize of his high calling in Christ." And if it be a necessary result of our seeming to others to come short, that we have but feeble and darkened evidences of our being made meet for the kingdom, indeed there is abundant cause for the fear expressed in the text: he who can be content to remain in doubt when he might have strong hope, almost shows, by not longing and striving for clearer proof, that what he already has is deceitful and vain.

But whilst there may thus be many reasons given why we should fear the seeming to come short, even were our personal well-being alone to be considered, the full force of the text, as with that which enjoins abstinence from the appearance of evil, is only to be brought out through reference to our being members the one of the other. We shall, therefore, take the passage under this point of view through the remainder of our discourse. In other words, we will examine what there is, in an appearance of failure, to do injury to the cause of Christianity, and therefore to justify the apostle in so emphatically calling upon you to fear, "lest, a promise being left you of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

Now as there are undoubtedly many ways in which we may actually come short, so must there be many in which we may apparently come short: who can tell up the methods in which the soul may be lost? neither can any one enumerate those in which it may seem to be lost. But we may fix on certain of the more prominent appearances of failure, or, rather, on certain of the more prominent reasons which may give others the impression that a Christian comes short; and when these shall have been fairly discussed and followed out, the general subject under review will have been so far made clear, that every one may apprehend any particular case.

And it must, we think, commend itself to you in the first place, that none will more "seem to come short," than those whose practice is in any way inconsistent with their profession, so that lookers-on can decide that their conduct is not strictly accordant with the principles by which they declare themselves actuated. This is the first great case on which we would fasten. We are far

from presuming to determine the amount of inconsistency which might be taken in proof of an actual coming short of the promised inheritance; for we remember, that, whilst perfection is that at which the Christian is to aim, it is that which, in this life, he may not hope to reach; and compassed as he is, and must be, with infirmity, he will often be betrayed into sin, notwithstanding that he hates it, and that his heart, on the whole, is right with his God.

But we are not now concerned with the actual, but only with the apparent coming short; and it must be clear that every inconsistency helps to the making us "seem to come short," however, through the being repented of and repaired through the grace of God, it may leave undamaged our spiritual estate. He who professes to "walk in the light as God is in the light," may occasionally wander into dark paths, and yet be mercifully restored; but it can hardly fail but that the impression produced on observers, especially on men of the world, will be one as to the weakness of his principles, or a want of power in that religion which professes itself adequate to the renewing the world. And who will pretend to compute the amount of damage done to the cause of vital Christianity by the inconsistencies of those who profess themselves subjected to its laws, and animated by its hopes? The heathen has adhered to his idols, because he can point to many who would invite him to a purer worship, but exhibit not a purer morality. The nominal Christian has been strengthened in his dislike and ridicule of piety of the heart, through observing that those supposed to possess it, could be fretful, malicious, covetous, or envious; to say nothing of more flagrant departures from conformity to the revealed will of God. It was, as you will remember, on such account as this, that, even when God extended forgiveness to David, who had grievously sinned, He inflicted also severe punishment,—“because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.” David did not actually “come short” of the promised inheritance, through sinning so heinously against the Lord; but David “seemed to come short;” he would have come short, had not genuine

repentance followed on grievous transgression; but there was, at least, all the appearance of thorough apostasy: and this appearance gave such occasion of blasphemy, that, in vindication of the righteousness of his government, God had to inflict judgment at the same time that He granted pardon.

But if flagrant acts, like those of David, were thus fruitful sources of blasphemy to the enemies of the Lord, no doubt acts of lesser criminality, the manifestations of undisciplined tempers, the utterances of unguarded speech, the inordinate indulgences of appetite, the adherences of the affections to perishable things, all work their measure of effect upon men who are on the watch for some charge against the Gospel, or for some excuse for resisting its claims; and also upon others who may be halting "between two opinions," at a loss whether to decide for God, or for the world. It is the place of a Christian to be as a city set on a hill; but "a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid;" and he may be quite sure, from the very position into which a religious profession brings him, that his every departure from the high standards of the Gospel, his every failure in the rigid subjection of himself to the law of God, as expanded and expounded by Christ, will serve in some way to do injury to others as well as to himself, producing an impression unfavorable to the worth and power of piety, whether in such as are glad to bring godliness into contempt, or in others who seek to be assured that Christianity can make good its professions and promises.

How vast, then, the importance of not even "seeming to come short!" Who will think it enough if he do not actually come short, and pass by the appearance as a thing of no moment? What, when he "seems to come short," in whose life are inconsistencies, contradictions, failures in obedience, and the like, which, if truly repented of, will not indeed prevent the final entrance into Heaven, but which are almost sure to be impediments in the way of many others, if not instrumental to their utter exclusion? Is this nothing? is this little? nothing, to bring reproach on the Gospel? little, to excite prejudice which may keep men from Christ? Oh, if you do but think that errors and

deviations, of which you are, through Divine grace, enabled yourselves to escape the everlasting penalties, may confirm opponents in their oppositions, and wanderers in their wanderings; and that thus, what is in you but the appearance of missing heaven, may help to the actually bringing others to eternal perdition; it cannot be that henceforward you will care only for what is, and nothing for what may seem to be, your state; you will enter fully and practically into the fear expressed by the Apostle, "lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

But there is another, if a less obvious mode of "seeming to come short." It should be observed, that, though the Apostle, when speaking of rest, must be considered as referring mainly to that rest which is future, there is a degree, or kind, of present rest which is attainable by the Christian, and which is both the type and foretaste of that which is to come. Thus St. Paul, in a verse which follows almost immediately on our text, says of Christians, "We which have believed do enter into rest;" and afterwards, "He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his," evidently making the entering into rest, a present thing, as well as a future. And undoubtedly, if he lived up to his privileges, there is a present rest which the Christian might enjoy. Our blessed Savior bequeathed peace, his own peace, as a legacy to his Church; and what Christ entailed on us, may surely be enjoyed by us. Without dwelling on what is popularly called the doctrine of personal election, and which, even if we were to allow it to be a thoroughly Scriptural doctrine, can give well-founded comfort to no one, except so far as he is using "all diligence to make his calling and election sure," we may certainly say that he who is meekly endeavoring to obey God's will, and humbly relying on the merit and mediation of Christ, ought to be so hopeful of final salvation as to present a happy deportment, in the midst even of many trials, and in spite even of many enemies. That fears will sometimes harass, and doubts cloud his mind, this is perhaps unavoidable; many are constitutionally timid and mistrustful: and it is not as

much observed as it ought to be, that conversion does not profess to alter the nervous system, and that this system will produce symptoms which are often anxiously submitted to the spiritual adviser, when they really come more properly within the province of the medical.

But when every just allowance has been made for constitution and circumstances, it may safely be affirmed that the general deportment of the believer should be that of serenity and hopefulness, the deportment of one who has already entered into rest, though not that perfect rest which yet "remaineth for the people of God." The religion of the Bible is a cheerful, happy-making religion: the very word "Gospel" signifies "glad tidings;" and he who has received good news into his heart, may justly be expected to exhibit in his demeanor, if not much of the rapture of joy, yet something of the quietness of peace. But it is in this that righteous persons are often grievously deficient; nay, they perhaps even think that it becomes them to go always mourning, and that, sinful as they are, it were worse than presumption in them ever to be cheerful. Hence, in place of struggling with doubts, and endeavoring to extinguish or eject them, they may be said actually to encourage them, as if they befitted their state, and either betokened, or cherished, humility. A great mistake this. There is commonly more of pride than of humility in doubts; he who is always doubting is generally searching in himself for some ground or reason of assurance; whereas, true, genuine humility, looks wholly out of self, not as forgetting the corruption which is there, but as fastening on the sufficiency which is in Christ.

But, without dissecting more narrowly the character of the always doubting Christian, we cannot hesitate to say of him, that he is one of those who "seem to come short." If a present, as well as a future rest, be promised to the righteous—and what else can be denoted by such words as these, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee?"—certainly he, at least, "seems to come short" of that rest, who is continually the prey of fear and disquietude, who has never any thing to express but apprehensions as to his deceiving himself, or who wears always

the appearance of one ill at ease in regard of his spiritual interests. And without denying that there may be thorough safety where there is all this seeming insecurity, we are bound to declare, that, so far as others are concerned, the Christian, who thus "seems to come short," is the cause of great injury. He presents religion under a false aspect: like one of the spies of old, he brings the promised land into disrepute, and discourages those whose business it is to go up and possess it. The world is disposed enough to give a morose and gloomy character to godliness, representing it as the opponent of all cheerfulness, and as requiring that we surrender whatsoever can minister to happiness. We tell the world, in reply, that it does thus but libel our faith; that there is nothing deserving the name of happiness, save with those who have devoted themselves to the service of Christ; and we challenge its attractions and enticements to put themselves, if they can, even into a present competition with that "peace of God which passeth all understanding."

But what are we to say to the world, when its appeal lies from assertions to facts? when it can point out religious persons as always melancholy and desponding? Why quote to us, the world will urge, the exquisitely beautiful words, "Come unto me, ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest," when so many, who are looking only to Jesus for rest, must, at least, be admitted to "seem to come short of it?" What indeed is to be said to the world? God forbid that we should bear hardly on those who have already much to bear, in the burden of their own doubts, misgivings, and fears. But I question whether Christians sufficiently consider the injury which they may do to the cause of the Savior, by not striving to "rejoice in the Lord," and to display in their deportment the happy-making power of vital religion. I question whether they sufficiently feel the duty of wrestling with those doubts which give them all the air of dispirited and disconsolate men—the duty, not merely, and not even chiefly, because doubts rob them of comforts which God graciously intended to be theirs; but because doubts, by thus throwing over them an aspect of sadness and gloom,

misrepresent piety, either causing or strengthening the impression that God is a hard task-master, and that, in keeping of his commandments, there is little or nothing of present reward.

It could hardly fail to be a new and strong motive with religious persons to the cultivating cheerfulness of deportment, and therefore to the withstanding those disheartening fears, which they perhaps think even wholesome, as keeping them humble—just as though a firm confidence of acceptance through the cross of the Redeemer were not itself the great foe of pride—if they carefully remembered that others will judge religion by its apparent effects, and that, if they see it produce only sadness, they will be likely to shun it as opposed to all joy. A gloomy Christian may not be always always able to help his gloom; but he should lament it, and strive with it: for what will a generous leader say of a soldier, who commissioned to enlist others under the same banner with himself, makes his appearance in the world as a terrified and half-famished prisoner? Oh no! it is not enough that ye do not come short. It is not enough that, through darkness and doubt, ye struggle at last into the kingdom of heaven. Ye should aim at something higher than this. Ye should aim at adorning the doctrine of the Savior, setting it off to the best advantage, recommending it to a world which is eager in the pursuit after happiness, as that which makes good the saying, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." And, therefore, in place of always harboring and indulging other fears, fears which, as originating in a sense of unworthiness, should be met with the truth that it was for the unworthy Jesus died, let the fear expressed in our text be henceforwards constant in operation, even the fear "lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

But now, having thus illustrated the text from inconsistency of conduct, and from the harboring of doubts, either of which will cause a Christian to "seem to come short," let us take one other case, one which is not perhaps indeed as much under our own power, but one against which we may be always endeavoring to provide. The great busi-

ness of life, as we all confess, is preparation for death. And a Christian's hope, a Christian's desire, should be that he may be enabled to meet death triumphantly, putting his foot on the neck of the last enemy, and proving that Christ hath despoiled him of his sting. It should not content him that he may pass in safety through the dark valley, though with little of that firm sense of victory which discovers itself in the exulting tone, or the burning vision. This indeed is much—oh! that we might believe that none, now present, would have less than this. But, in having only this, a Christian may "seem to come short." And there is often a mighty discouragement from the death-beds of the righteous, when, as the darkness thickens, and the strength declines, there is apparently but little consolation from the prospect of eternity. Even as, on the other hand, when a righteous man is enabled to meet death exultingly, as though he had but to step into the car of fire, and be wafted almost visibly to the heavenly city, there is diffused over a neighborhood a sort of animating influence; the tidings of the victory spread rapidly from house to house: the boldness of infidelity quails before them; meek piety takes new courage, and attempts new toils.

And it ought not, therefore, to satisfy us that we may so die as not to come short of heaven: we ought to labor that we may so die as not even to "seem to come short of it." It is doubly dying, if, in dying, we work an injury to our brethren; it is scarcely dying, if we strengthen them for their departure out of life. This is, in its measure, the doing what was done by the Redeemer Himself, who, "through death, destroyed him that had the power of death:" the believer, as he enters the grave, deals a blow at the tyrant, which renders him less terrible to those who have yet to meet him in the final encounter. And by continued preparation for death, by accustoming ourselves to the anticipation of death, by the striving always so to live that death may not take us by surprise, but that, having the loins girt, the lamps trimmed, and the lights burning, we may be as men expecting the bridegroom, we may indeed hope to be so ready, through God's help, for the act of departure, that our passage through

the valley shall be rather with the tread of the conqueror, than with the painful step of the timid pilgrim.

It is true that we have not power over the circumstances of our death; that we cannot insure ourselves a triumphant death; and that God, for wise ends, may often be pleased, in removing his people from earth, to withhold from them those glimpses of things within the veil, which, whenever vouchsafed, seem to light up a sick room, as though angels, with their bright wings, were visibly present. But perhaps it may be generally true, that they who have made it their aim that they might not "seem to come short" during life, are not permitted to "seem to come short" in death. He who lives most consistently is perhaps commonly enabled to die most triumphantly. He who is most earnest in scattering those doubts which are dishonoring to the Savior, harassing to himself, and injurious to the Church, will find the termination of his earthly path haunted with fewest of those dark and spectral things, which agitate a believer, even though he feel that his Redeemer is near.

See, then, a new motive to the striving so to live that you may not "seem to come short," whether of the practice or the privilege of true followers of Christ. It is thus that you may have reason to hope that you shall not "seem to come short" when you die. And again we say, think not little of this. I have before me two pictures; come and gaze, and then think it little if you can. I see a Christian stretched on his death-bed, patient indeed, and hearkening eagerly to the words of those who stand round, and who are speaking to him of that "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." But there is

little of hopefulness in his look, and as little in his language. "O my friends"—these are his struggling utterances—"it is an awful thing to die. I trust that the Savior in whom I have believed will not desert me in this sad extremity; but there is much of darkness on my mind, now that I most need the cheering light." The weeping relatives are not dismayed by these words; for they have reason to be assured of the piety of the dying man; but they feel more and more the tremendousness of death, and, in their broken whisperings one to another, they say, Alas for ourselves, when even this our brother "seems to come short."

But I see another Christian meeting death. His look is that of one who already has his hand on an incorruptible crown. His voice, weakened indeed by approaching dissolution, gives forth the tones of confidence and exultation. "Sorrow not for me, my beloved ones. With Stephen, I see Jesus at the right hand of God. With Job, 'I know that my Redeemeth liveth.' I am safe in the good Shepherd's keeping: yet another struggle, and I am with Him for ever in the rich pastures above."

Ah! how do these words encourage survivors. They go forth like men armed anew for duty and trial. They tell the scene to others. The whole Church rallies round the grave, and takes fresh courage. The dead man, who thus visibly conquered, is like Elisha in the sepulchre—to touch his bones is to gain new life. Ah! look upon this; and will you not henceforward live as those who fear, "lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you," at the last, "should seem to come short of it?"

SERMON XI.

SIMON THE CYRENIAN.

“And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.”—
MATTHEW xxvii. 32.

This fact is also recorded, and almost in the same terms, by St. Mark and St. Luke; and we may think that three evangelists would scarcely have all inserted it in their narratives, had it not deserved more attention than it seems ordinarily to receive. The circumstance is not noticed by St. John, whose object was rather to supply deficiencies in former gospels, than to repeat their statements. But St. John enables us better to understand the laying the cross upon Simon: for we could not determine from the three first evangelists whether or not it had been first laid upon Christ. This is an important point, as you will afterwards see: we could gather little or nothing from the fact that Simon was made to carry the cross, if we were not sure that it was first carried by Christ. But this is not affirmed either by St. Matthew, St. Mark, or St. Luke. These evangelists merely mention that the soldiers, as they led away Jesus to crucify Him, met with Simon the Cyrenian, and compelled him to be the cross-bearer: but whatever we might have conjectured, or whatever we might have concluded from the usual practice of the Romans, we could not have been confident from this, that Christ had borne his cross till it was thus laid upon another.

But St. John, omitting all notice of Simon, expressly says of our Lord, “He, bearing his cross, went forth into a place, called the place of a skull.” This is a beautiful instance of the nicety with which the fourth evangelist may be said to have observed what was wanting in the other three: he fills up, so to speak, a crevice, or puts in a link, so as to com-

plete a narrative, or unite its scattered parts.

Combining the accounts of the several historians, we now know that when our Lord was given up by Pilate to the will of his enemies, the soldiers, as was the ordinary practice in regard of those sentenced to crucifixion, laid upon Him the cross whereon He was to die. After He had carried it a certain distance, the soldiers, for one reason or another, took it from Him, and placed it on a Cyrenian whom they happened to meet; and this Simon bore it to Calvary. We have no certain information as to who Simon was, whether or not a disciple of Christ. He is mentioned by St. Mark as “the father of Alexander and Rufus:” but though this would seem to indicate that he and his family were well known at the time, it does not help us to determine particulars. The probability would seem to be, that he was at least disposed to favor Christ, and that this his disposition was matter of notoriety—nothing is more likely than that it was on account of his attachment to Jesus, and for the sake therefore of exposing him to public ridicule, that the soldiers compelled him to carry the cross.

But allowing the probability that he was known to favor the cause of Christ, we have no means of ascertaining whether he were a Jew or a Gentile: for ecclesiastical history furnishes nothing respecting him beyond what is furnished by the evangelists. In the book indeed of the Acts of the Apostles, where the prophets and teachers in the Church of Antioch are enumerated, we have mention of “Simeon that was called

Niger;" and many have imagined that this might be "Simon the Cyrenian"—the surname Niger, or black, being thought to accord with the birthplace; for Cyrene was a city and province of Libya in Africa. If this identity were determined, there would be no doubt as to Simon's having been a Jew: but it is merely the resemblance in name which has led to the supposition; and even this resemblance is insufficient to support any theory; for the same Evangelist speaks of Simon the Cyrenian, and of Simeon, called Niger. We must therefore be content to remain ignorant in regard of the individual who bore the cross of Christ; and we may find that this ignorance will not interfere with the lessons to be drawn from the occurrence.

The occurrence itself, as we have already intimated, is one which may be easily overlooked, but which perhaps only requires to be carefully considered in order to the being found full of interest and instruction. Let us then join ourselves to the multitude who are thronging round Jesus, as, with slow and fainting steps, He toils towards Calvary. There is a moment's pause: an individual is met, coming out of the country: the attendant soldiers seize him, and compel him to bear the cross which the Redeemer had hitherto carried. This is the incident which we are to ponder: we will go no further with the infuriated crowd; but, sitting down, will examine what truths and lessons may be derived from what has just been observed, namely, that "as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross."

Now it is very interesting to remark how the accomplishment of ancient prophecy seems often to have hung upon a thread, so that the least thing, a thought or a word, might have sufficed to prevent its occurrence. There are many predictions in reference to Christ, which could only be fulfilled by his enemies, and of which we might have expected that these enemies, anxious to disprove his claims, would have been too shrewd to help the accomplishment. The marvel is, that these enemies were not more on the alert; that they should have done, or allowed things which, on a moment's consideration, they might have seen to be evidences that Jesus was Messiah.

One would have expected that, with prophecies in their hands which they themselves applied to the Christ, they would have taken pains to prevent, so far as possible, their apparent fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth. And yet, as if judicially blinded, they themselves brought about the fulfilment, and that, too, in cases where prevention seemed quite in their power. Did they not know what Zechariah had predicted in reference to the price at which Christ would be sold? and yet they sold Jesus for the very sum; a thought only being wanting, and one piece of money might have been added or taken off, and thus a noted prophecy have failed of accomplishment in Him whom they crucified. Thus again, how easy it would have been—and for men who were seeking to disprove the pretensions of Jesus, how natural—to take care that vinegar and gall should not be given Him on the cross, and that the soldiers should not part his garments amongst them, nor cast lots upon his vesture. There would have been no difficulty, in these and other similar respects, in hindering the fulfilment of prophecy: and the wonder is, that men, familiar with prophecy, accustomed to apply it to the Messiah, and eager at the same time to prove that Jesus was not the Messiah, should have either effected or permitted the fulfilment, thus completing the evidence, which they had full power, as it seemed, to weaken or mutilate.

It is a striking proof of the thorough certainty with which God can reckon on every working of the human mind, that He should thus have put it into the power of the bitter enemies of Jesus to arrest the fulfilment of prophecies. He could so shape predictions that a single thought, and that the thought most likely to arise, would be enough to prevent their being accomplished in his Son; and yet be as sure that every tittle would come accurately to pass, as if He had ordered it by a decree as abiding as Himself. It is not that God interfered, by any direct influence, to make men act as He had foretold that they would—for this would be to suppose Him partaker in their wickedness, accomplishing as well as predicting. He left the enemies of Christ to themselves, quite at liberty to take their own course: but his prescience assured Him what that

course would be; and, acting simply on his foreknowledge, He could place a prophecy within a hair-breadth, as we think, of being defeated, whilst its fulfilment was as certain as though it had occurred.

And we consider that we have in the narrative now under review an instance of prophecy thus accomplished, when it seemed within an ace of being unfulfilled. There is no more illustrious type of the Redeemer, presented in sacrifice to God, than Isaac, whom, at the Divine command, his father Abraham prepared to offer on Moriah. We have every reason for supposing that, in and through this typical oblation, God instructed the patriarch in the great truth of human redemption; so that it was as he stood by the altar, and lifted up his knife to slay his son, that Abraham discerned the shinings of Christ's day, and rejoiced in the knowledge of a propitiation for sin. And whatever the measure in which Abraham was instructed as to the figurative meaning of the offering up of Isaac, there can be no doubt with ourselves that herein was accurately portrayed the sacrifice of Christ—the sacrifice presented, in the fulness of time, on the very spot where Abraham was directed to immolate his son.

But it is among the most significant, perhaps, and certainly the most affecting, parts of the typical transaction, that Isaac was made to carry the wood on which he was to be presented in sacrifice to God. We read that "Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son." Are we to think that this was done without explicit direction from God? It is hardly credible. Abraham, full of tenderness towards Isaac, his whole soul yearning over the son of his love, and agonized by the command which he was hastening to obey, would not have laid the heavy burden on the lad, unless in conformity with an injunction from God. Of Abraham we are told, that he "took the fire in his hand, and a knife." So that the patriarch had nothing but what was light to carry: the only burdensome thing—and it must have been burdensome, if there were wood enough for such a burnt-offering as Abraham expected—was bound upon the child; incredible, we may say, had the father been left to himself: for the consciousness

that he must soon pierce the heart of his son, would only make him more tender and affectionate till the fatal moment came. We take it therefore as expressly ordered by God, that the wood of the burnt-offering should be laid upon Isaac: it was a part of the type: and, taking the type as a prophecy, we might justly speak of a flaw in the fulfilment, were there nothing that answered to it in the oblation of Christ. And to those who knew nothing of the exact mode in which Christ was to suffer, this might have seemed one of the obscurest portions of the type: how the sacrifice could carry the wood on which he was to die, was a question that could hardly be answered, until it was known that the death would be the death of the cross.

But the type was thoroughly fulfilled in this singular particular, when our Lord was led forth, carrying his cross. This was, to the letter, Isaac, bearing the wood for the burnt-offering. Yet how near was the prophecy to the being defeated! It was only for a part of the way that Christ carried the cross. The soldiers then took it from Him, and placed it on another. And they might at the first have seized on some bystander and given him the burden. It could not have been indispensable that Christ should bear it Himself: for, on such supposition, they would hardly have transferred the load. And if any of the Pharisees or scribes, remembering the typical history of Isaac, and determining that it should not foreshadow that of Jesus, had suggested to the soldiery, perhaps with affected compassion, that it might be as well to lay the cross on another, it is probable enough that they would have acted on the suggestion, and done that at first which they were ready to do after a little delay. So near may the type have been to the being unfulfilled; so little may have been wanting to prevent the accomplishment of a signal prediction. But God, who could speak through his servant Zechariah of thirty pieces of silver as the price of the Messiah, and be confident that a prophecy, which He made it easy to defeat, would be fulfilled to the very letter, could command also the wood to be bound upon Isaac, and know that, notwithstanding the palpable character of the type, the cross would be bound upon Christ.

And this is the first reflection which we have to make, as we see that Simon the Cyrenian is constrained to carry the cross after Christ. Had we met the procession when a little further advanced, we might have said, This suffering man, who is led forth to death, cannot possibly be Messiah, the antitype to Isaac; for he does not bear the wood on which He is to die. But now we have beheld the transfer of the cross: we know that it was not laid upon Simon, until it had been carried by Christ, until, that is, the type had been fulfilled, and Isaac had reappeared in a greater than himself. And it is the transfer of the cross which makes so remarkable the fulfilment of the type. Had Christ borne the cross to the end, we might have thought it a matter of course that the type should be fulfilled, regarding the fulfilment as assured by the known customs of a Roman execution. But the fulfilment is here in jeopardy; it lasted only a portion of the time; it might therefore have not occurred at all: caprice on the part of the soldiers, or design upon that of the scribes, might have entirely prevented it. And I seem to have before me a beautiful evidence how the fore knowledge of God can assure Him of the minutest particulars, of every turn of human thought, of every motion of the human will, when I find that Jesus did indeed come forth bearing his cross, and therefore accomplishing an illustrious prediction, but that shortly afterwards, in the course, for aught I know, of a very few minutes, the soldiers laid hold on one Simon, a Cyrenian, and compelled him to carry the cross after Christ.

But what induced the fierce and brutal soldiers to grant the Redeemer this little indulgence, and relieve Him for a time from the burden of the cross? We have already supposed that Simon the Cyrenian was laid hold of, on account of his being known to favor Christ's cause, and partly, therefore, with the design of exposing him to ridicule. But it is not to be imagined that this was the only, nor even the chief, reason. Had not the condition of Christ been such as to suggest, in some sense, the necessity of relieving Him of the load, we can hardly think that the cross would have been removed. It may have been that even the soldiers were moved to some

thing like pity, as they saw the Redeemer tottering beneath the weight. It may have been that they feared, that, if they now goaded on the innocent sufferer, death would ensue before they reached the place of execution, and rob them of their victim. Or it may have been that those who were eager to crucify the Savior were impatient of delay; his feeble steps were too slow for their malice; and they urged the removal of the cross, that they might accelerate the time of his being fastened to it with the nails.

But in any case, it must have been the exhausted condition of our Lord which gave occasion to the removal of the cross: it was transferred to Simon, because, to all appearance, Christ was unable to bear it to Calvary. And this is just that incidental notice which supplies the place of lengthened narrative, and lets us in, as it were, to the greatness of the Mediator's endurances. You cannot fail to be struck, when you read the accounts of the crucifixion, with the utter absence of those expressions of pain, or assertions of suffering, which abound in mere human histories of some tragic occurrence. If you except that most thrilling exclamation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" there is nothing whatsoever uttered by the suffering Redeemer, from which you can conclude that He suffered at all. And even this exclamation indicated mental, rather than bodily anguish: the deep and piteous cry was wrung from Christ, not by the tortures of crucifixion, but by the hiding, the eclipse, of the countenance of his Father. Indeed, it is also recorded by St. John, that Jesus, as He hung on the cross, exclaimed, "I thirst;" and this may be taken as an expression of corporeal suffering. But it is very observable, that the Evangelist distinctly states that Jesus said this, in order "that the Scripture might be fulfilled," for the sake of effecting the accomplishment of the prediction, "And in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." It seems implied by St. John, that Christ would have said nothing as to his thirst, had He not remembered a prophecy which was yet unaccomplished, so that the exclamation is hardly to be given in proof of the greatness of bodily anguish.

And it might not be very difficult to arrange something like a plausible theo-

ry that the Redeemer was incapable of suffering in the body: for it is evident enough that He did not die through any extremity of nature; He was not exhausted, but voluntarily breathed out his soul: and when you add this to the fact, that not a word escaped Him from which we can certainly gather that He suffered in the flesh, there might certainly seem some ground for supposing, that, though He bore a human form, He was not accessible to human pain. And we need not stay to show you how fatal such a supposition would be to the whole Christian system: for you all know, that, had not Christ been, in the strictest sense, a man, a man like one of ourselves, sin only excepted, He could not have acted as our surety in turning away from us the anger of God. But a man like one of ourselves He could not have been, unless, like one of ourselves, He had been accessible to pain, so as to feel, and to suffer keenly in feeling, the scourging, and the buffeting, and the driving of the nails. It seems therefore as if it would be inexpressibly valuable to us, were it only recorded that He groaned or sighed when submitting to the fearful processes of crucifixion. Had but the least sign of anguish escaped Him—of bodily anguish; for mental is quite another thing; He evinced this in the garden as well as on the cross; but it was purely mental, and proved nothing as to his flesh;—had then the least sign of bodily anguish escaped Him, a look, a cry, a convulsive start, and had it been mentioned by Evangelists, it would have served to identify the Redeemer with ourselves, and to make us feel that he was indeed “bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh.” But a crucifixion without the slightest manifestation of pain, nay, with such manifestation of superiority to pain, that the crucified one could count over what prophecies yet remained to be accomplished, give directions as to a home for his mother, and determine at what moment his soul should depart; this almost looks as though He who hung upon the cross had no feeling of the torture; and how then could He have been my kinsman in all but depravity, my brother in all but my guilt?

But here the incident, on which we are discoursing, comes in, and scatters all doubt. I could not spare this inci-

dent; it just serves to assure me of the bodily sufferings of Christ; it is to me what an extorted groan would have been, a decisive witness, that the marvellous patience of the Redeemer in no degree indicated that He did not feel in the flesh. For why is the cross taken from Him, and placed upon Simon? Because He could scarcely advance, so exhausted was He with what He had endured, and so oppressed by the burden. He had already been scourged and buffeted. He had been smitten on the head with a reed: his brow had been pierced with the thorns: cruel insults had been heaped upon Him: for the soldiers had arrayed Him in purple, and bowed tauntingly before Him, “saying, Hail, king of the Jews.” And there is not the least hint given by the Evangelists, that, throughout this fierce and ignominious treatment, He gave any indication of pain: He might have been more than a stoic, indifferent to pain; He might have been of a nature which was incapable of pain. But when the cross was laid upon Him, and, after a time, He grew faint beneath the load—ah, then was it seen how what He passed through told upon the body; He had felt, if He had not shown his feeling; and now as he tottered feebly on, almost prostrated by his burden, a sinking sufferer whose every step seemed likely to be his last, indeed, indeed, it was evident that He was but a man, in the having flesh which could quiver, if He were more than a man in his power over body and soul. And thus is the incident narrated in our text, and which may be easily passed by with but cursory notice, most consolatory to those who seek to be assured that the Mediator “suffered, being tempted,” and that the mysterious fact of his combining in one person the Divine nature and the human, did not exempt Him from such capacity of pain as might qualify Him to sympathize with the groaning and oppressed.

We tell you again, we could not spare this incident: it would leave a gap in evangelical histories, which it would be quite beyond our power to fill. We have indeed evidence that Christ could hunger, and thirst, and be weary; and all such evidence is most precious, as testifying to the real humanity of the Savior. But nevertheless, the evidence

is far from being considerable; and if you set it against the account of a crucifixion, in which there is not the least proof that any pain was felt, you might find it hard to furnish a convincing demonstration that Christ suffered in the body like one of ourselves. What we want is a clear witness, that He was no more incapable of bodily pain than any other of our race; but just where you would most naturally look for this witness, in the record of those endurances through which He presented Himself in sacrifice to God, you cannot find it in the very lowest degree, if you remove the account of the bearing the cross. I look with a sort of fearfulness and awe upon the Mediator, as malice and cruelty seem unable to wring from Him a sigh or a groan. I gaze in utter amazement, as He is lacerated by stripes, stricken by rude hands, baited by the rabble, and yet suffers no sign to escape Him that He feels the wounds, and writhes under the indignities. And as He is nailed to the cross, and then that cross, straining under its living burden, is lifted from the earth, and made to quiver in its socket, I can but expect the low moan of anguish, if not the wild and piercing shriek; and it startles me more, that there should be deep, sepulchral silence, than had the air been rent with the cries of the sufferer. Is this man, as well as God, over whom pain would seem to have no power? Is his humanity any thing more than a phantom? is it real, if thus, to all appearance, inaccessible to pain? Ah, it is not inaccessible to pain: the scourging has been felt, the driving of the nails has been felt, the fixing the cross has been felt. If yonder victim have power to suppress the indications of agony, his agony is not the less actual, not the less intense. He has already shown that He feels what He endures. He has already given evidence enough to assure the most doubtful, that He is verily a man, with all a man's susceptibilities, his consciousness of pain, his capacity of being tortured. For as He came out from the city, bearing his cross, so worn down was He by his sufferings, so faint with loss of blood, so exhausted by fatigue, that even his remorseless enemies either pitied Him, or feared that He would die before He was crucified: "the soldiers found a man of

Cyrene, Simon by name, and him they compelled to bear his cross."

Now hitherto we have considered the incident of the transfer of the cross, with reference exclusively to our Savior; examining it first in connexion with an ancient type: and then as illustrating the reality of those sufferings through which Christ made atonement for the sins of the world. We have not yet treated the incident as itself typical or symbolical; though we can hardly doubt that an event, which has apparently so much of significance, was designed to be received by us as a parable, and interpreted as a lesson to the Church.

It can hardly fail to occur to you, that, on more than one occasion, Christ had spoken of taking up and carrying the cross, when He wished to represent what would be required of his disciples. "And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." "Go thy way, 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." There cannot well be doubt, that, in adopting this peculiar imagery, in making the bearing of the cross the test of discipleship, our Lord had respect to his own crucifixion: the metaphor, the figure of speech, was one whose use must have arisen from the death which He foreknew that He should die. And it is only in consistence with the uniform course of our Savior's public teaching, that we should expect the same lesson in significative emblems or actions, as we find delivered in his sermons or conversations. You are all aware that miracles served as parables; so that much which Christ was in the habit of asserting in words, He set forth figuratively in those actions which attested him to be a teacher commissioned by God. The miracles were thus not only his credentials as a Prophet: they declared the subject matter of his teaching, as well as substantiated his authority to teach. And if the duty of taking up the cross, frequently urged as it was in the discourses of Christ, had been one which admitted of being readily set forth in his miracles, we may believe that we should long before have had its figurative as well as its verbal announcement. But

as Christ was literally to bear his cross only once, there may have been nothing to suggest, or give occasion for, the typical exhibition until that day of wonder and of fear, when He was delivered to the will of his enemies. Then however was it ordered that the truth, so often urged in discourse, should be displayed in significant action: when the Redeemer has literally a cross to bear, that cross is also literally borne by one of his adherents.

And we do not know whether the figurative lesson ought not to be considered as going beyond the verbal. What the Savior had spoken of, and what He had enjoined, was simply the bearing the cross—the performing duties, and the submitting to endurances, from which nature might be averse, but which were appointed unto those who would gain eternal life. He had not spoken of his own cross as that which his disciples were to carry: but now, before He departs from the world, He would teach them that they must not only bear some cross or another if they would follow Him to glory, but that very cross which He carried Himself. And it may be in reference to this, to the sameness of the cross borne by the Master and the disciples, that St. Paul uses a very remarkable expression in writing to the Colossians: “I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the Church.” There was no deficiency in the afflictions of Christ, so far as they were propitiatory; and if there had been, no Apostle, and no company of Apostles, could have filled up that which was behind. Yet this is what St. Paul represents himself as doing; and we can only understand him as speaking of his afflictions, as arising from the same causes, and endured for the same ends, as those of the Redeemer, and moreover as necessary to the Church—not indeed in the sense of expiating its guilt, but in that of being instrumental to the adding to its numbers. St. Paul, like Christ, was persecuted for righteousness’ sake: like Christ, he submitted to persecution, for the purpose of benefiting others; therefore his sufferings might be spoken of as a part of that aggregate of woe, which had to be sustained in order to the salvation of the body, the Church. So that the representation of the Apos-

tle in regard of himself, is precisely that which we might draw from Christ’s last instance of symbolical teaching—the disciple bore the cross which his master had borne; even as that laid upon Simon, had been carried by Christ.

Let not the symbolical lesson be hastily dismissed, as though it were not important enough to be carefully pondered, or as though we were too familiar with it to require that it be often repeated. There is no greater mistake than that which would represent it as an easy thing to attain eternal life. Just because Christianity is the revelation of a free pardon to transgressors, the announcement of a wondrous interposition of Deity on our behalf—an interposition through which there has been provided for the guilty, without money and without price, whatsoever is required to their full justification—therefore is it surmised that there is little, if any thing, for the guilty to do; and that salvation asks no effort, seeing that confessedly no effort could deserve it. But again and again must the protest be delivered against a theory so opposed to the Gospel, and so fatal to the soul. There are such things as conditions of salvation; it is not legalizing, it is not frustrating the grace of God, to assert and insist on conditions of salvation. Salvation is a free gift: let the tongue cleave to the roof of the mouth, rather than give utterance to a syllable which shall seem to impeach the freeness of the gift. But the gift is bestowed only upon those who “by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honor, and immortality.” Since it is still a gift, it cannot be the “patient continuance” which procures it: for then it would be debt, and no longer gift. The “patient continuance” however is required of all who hope for the gift, required as a condition, a condition without which God does not please to bestow, but which, in no degree whatsoever, obliges Him to bestow, and which therefore, when most rigidly performed, takes not one tittle away from the unlimited freeness of the gift. And thus with all its gratuitousness, with all its assertion of human insufficiency, and all its proffers of forgiveness and righteousness, the Gospel lays an unceasing demand on every energy, requiring of us that we “work out with fear and trembling,” that salva-

tion for ourselves, which we thankfully confess to have been wrought out for us by Christ.

In short, the bearing the cross is revealed as the indispensable prerequisite to the wearing the crown. And the memorable thing is, that it is Christ's cross which must be borne. You are not to think that every cross is the cross which the Savior requires you to take up. Many a cross is of our own manufacture: our troubles are often but the consequences of our sins, and we may not dignify these by supposing them the cross which is to distinguish the Christian. Crosses they may be; but they are not the cross which was laid upon Simon, and which had first been on Christ. The cross of Christ is endurance for the glory of God, and the furtherance of the Gospel: "this is thank-worthy," saith St. Peter, "if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully." It is something more than self-denial, though frequently spoken of as though it were the same; for our Lord distinguishes them when He says, in words already quoted, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." We read of the Apostles of Christ, that they rejoiced that "they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name,"—and this was both bearing his cross, and feeling it an honor to bear it. So that he alone bears Christ's cross who suffers in his cause, who has troubles to endure simply because he is a Christian.

And be ye thoroughly assured, that "the offence of the cross" has not ceased. He who glories in the cross of Christ, will certainly find that cross laid upon himself. He cannot separate from the world without incurring the frown and derision of the world; and these are but the modern forms of persecution, less virulent indeed than the ancient, but often to the full as galling and oppressive. And if there be one of you who is not aware that he has a cross of this kind to carry, that religion exposes him to any measure of obloquy, contempt or opposition, let him rather fear that he is not a real Christian, than question whether Christ's cross have indeed been transferred to his disciples. You may not have the cross: but it should suggest to you the inquiry, Can

I be a disciple? And further, let the followers of Christ learn, that nothing whatsoever is to be gained by those compromises which may be made with the hope of conciliating the world. If you truly belong to Christ, you must bear the frown of the world; and all that you will get by evading, or trying to disarm it, is, that when it comes, as come it must, it will be all the severer for having been shunned. Where had Simon the Cyrenian been, whilst Christ was enduring shame and indignity? Not in Jerusalem: he was met, as St. Mark states, "coming out of the country." Supposing him a disciple, he ought to have remained with Christ in his hour of danger: but he had probably gone out of the way, wishing to let the storm blow over before he showed himself in the city: and now he may have been returning, calculating that the worst was past, and that no harm could happen to him from his reputed adherence to Christ. This was declining the cross; and the short-sighted policy met a full retribution. He is compelled to bear the cross. The soldiers seize him, the multitude scoff him; and he has perhaps a thousandfold more to sustain than had he not thought to ward off, by a cowardly absence, what in one form or another a Christian must bear, or be a Christian in nothing but name.

Be ye certain, then, not only that, if Christians, you must carry Christ's cross, but that you make it all the heavier by avoiding it when it lies in the clear path of duty. There is no such way of incurring shame as the being ashamed of Christ. For if you be not left, in just judgment on your cowardice and desertion, to harden into mere nominal disciples, of whom Christ will be ashamed when He cometh with his angels, you may be sure that you shall be punished with an aggravated measure of the very contempt which you have thought to avoid. Even the world respects consistency; and its bitterest scorn is for those who have tried to disarm it by concealing, if not abjuring, their principles. Simon might have remained in Jerusalem, and then have followed Christ to Calvary with but little observation: but forasmuch as he is met, "coming out of the country," he shall be the sport of the rabble, a mark for universal ridicule and scorn.

And yet even in his case, there is one other particular which should be noted for the comfort of the Church. The cross was carried by Christ, before it was carried by Simon. The arrangement might have been different: the disciple might have borne the burden the first part of the way, and then it might have been laid on the Master. But our comfort is, that the cross which we must carry has been already carried by Christ, and therefore, like the grave which He entered, been stripped of its hatefulness. It might almost be said to have changed its nature through being laid on the Son of God: it left behind it its terribleness, its oppressiveness: and now, as transferred to the disciple, it is indeed a cross, but a cross which it is a privilege to bear, a cross which God never fails to give strength to bear, a cross, which, as leading to a crown, may justly be prized, so that we would not have it off our shoulders, till the diadem is on our brow. "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ"—and this is the cross—"happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you." O see ye not, then, how eloquent and comprehensive a homily was delivered through the simple incident related in our text? It is one of Christ's last and most impressive sermons. He would not leave the world without furnishing a standing memorial, that his disciples must bear the same cross as Himself, inasmuch as, like Himself, they must endure the world's hatred as champions and examples of truth. And together with this memorial He would show, by a powerful instance, that, in religion, a temporizing policy is sure to defeat itself, so that to fly from the cross is commonly to meet it, dilated in size, and heavier in material. But He had one more truth to represent at the same time—the beautiful comforting truth, that He has borne what his followers have to bear, and thereby so lightened it, that, as with death, which He made sleep to the believer, the burden but quickens the step towards the "exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And that He might effect and convey all this through one great significant action, it was ordered, we may believe, that, as they led away Jesus, carrying like Isaac the wood for the burnt-offering, the soldiers laid hold on one

Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and him they compelled to bear his cross.

And is this all that was typically represented by the laying of the cross on Simon the Cyrenian? Indeed we ought never to press a type too far: it is easy, by indulging the imagination, to injure or bring into discredit the whole of the figurative lesson. Yet there is one thing more which we would venture to advance, though we may not speak with the same confidence as when asserting that Christ taught by action, as He had before taught by word, that his disciples must suffer with Him, if they ever hope to reign. We have already mentioned our inability to ascertain any particulars respecting Simon, or even to determine whether he were a Jew or a Pagan. Many of the ancient fathers suppose him to have been a Pagan, and consider that, in being made to bear the cross after Christ, He typified the conversion of idolatrous nations which either have been or will be brought to a profession of faith in our Lord. And there are no such reasons against this opinion as can require its rejection, nor such even as can show that the weight of probability is on the opposite side. We must be therefore at liberty to entertain the opinion, and, at least, to point out the inferences which would follow on supposition of its truth.

But once let it be considered that Simon was a Pagan, and our text becomes one of those bright, prophetic lines which shoot through centuries of gloom, giving promise of a morning, if they cannot scatter night. It is not the single fact of his having been a heathen on which we would now fasten: for there are scriptural assertions in abundance, that the heathen have been given to Christ for an inheritance, and that all the ends of the earth shall yet look to Him as a Savior; so that if the laying of the cross upon Simon merely intimated prophetically the conversion of the Gentiles, it would be but one in a series of predictions, and might not claim any special attention. But Simon was a Cyrenian—this is carefully noted by each of the three evangelists—and Cyrene, as we mentioned in commencing our discourse, was a city and province of Africa. Then it was on an African that the cross was laid—on an inhabitant, a native of that

country which, from the earliest days, has been burdened with a curse; the malediction pronounced upon Ham, "a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren," having been fearfully exacted, so that those sprung from the second son of Noah have, all along, been ground down and trampled on by the descendants of the other two.

Africa—the very name is sufficient to call up a blush, wheresoever there are the feelings of a man. The wrongs of the negro fill perhaps the darkest page in the history of our race. But whilst those who have oppressed the Africans have been just as criminal as though the oppression had not been distinctly predicted, it is vain to shut our eyes to the fact, that the period has not yet closed during which, by Divine appointment, this tribe of human kind is to be injured and enslaved. Those philanthropic individuals acted nobly and well, who fought in this country the battle of the slave, and would not rest till the senate branded and proscribed the traffic in human sinew and bone. And our country did gloriously when she threw down her millions as a ransom, resolving to extinguish slavery in her colonies, but to maintain, at the same time, good faith and justice. We speak of all this as noble and excellent, because we believe it to have been our duty as Christians to set ourselves against slavery as hostile to the spirit of the Gospel, and to attempt this duty at all costs, and, what is more, all risks. But if we were to argue from consequences, in place of from principles, we might almost hesitate to rejoice that the attack upon slavery had ever been made. Notwithstanding all that has been done for Africa, Africa, alas! is as wretched as ever, as much rifled of her children, as though the ancestral curse were not yet worn out, and, whilst it were in force, the effort to benefit could only work injury. But is this to continue? Undoubtedly not,—for every prophecy which asserts the universal diffusion of Christianity must be considered as announcing a time when the wrongs of Africa shall terminate, and her tortured children enter into the liberty of the sons of God.

But where there is special wretchedness one seems to crave a special prophecy. It is such a trial of faith to find

that we seem unable to do anything for Africa, her vast deserts being still the grave of all who would explore them, and the bondage of her children only growing with efforts for their emancipation, that we long for specific predictions, assuring us that Africa is not excluded from the promised glory, but will throw off every shackle, whether of the mind or the body. There are such predictions. "Princes shall come out of Egypt; the Morian's land shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." "Behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there." "The labor of Egypt, and merchandize of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine." I rejoice in prophecies which tell of blessings for Ethiopia. I remember the question, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin?" and I feel that these prophecies belong to the negro. When the eunuch of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, goes on his way rejoicing because believing in Jesus, I seem to have a pledge of mercy in store for the negro. But all this hardly comes up to the measure of the case. O for an ampler prophecy, a more express type. There is scarce enough in such passing intimations as these, to sustain the faith which is staggered by the increasing wretchedness of Africa, and its undiminished wickedness. Then let us go and look on the Redeemer as He toils towards Calvary. Who is it that, in the ordering of Providence, has been appointed to carry his cross? A Cyrenian, an African. I read the prophecy, I apprehend the type. Land, that hath long been accursed, whose children have verily been the servants of servants, over which has hung so ponderous a gloom, that those most hopeful of improvement in human condition have almost turned from thee in despair—bright times await thee. Thou art not in bondage for ever; thy chains shall yet be dashed away: the star of Bethlehem, the sun of righteousness, shall yet break upon thy provinces and gleam in thy waters; the anthem which ascribes praise, and glory, and honor to the Lamb that was slain, shall float through thy forests, and be echoed by thy mountains. Not without a meaning was one of thy sons selected to bear the cross after Christ, and thus to fill a post to which

the martyrs and confessors of every age of Christianity have counted it their highest honor to succeed. It was as though to tell us that even Africa shall yet be brought to the discipleship of Jesus. Europe gave not this type of the Gentile world submitting itself to Christ. Asia was not permitted to own the favored individual. America, as yet unknown to the rest of the earth, might not send the representative of heathen-

ism. Africa is the privileged country; an African follows Jesus—oh, the darkness of many generations seems scattered; and I rejoice in the assurance that the land of slaves shall be the home of freedom, the land of misery the home of happiness, the land of idolatry the home of Christianity, when I observe that it was one Simon, a Cyrenian, whom the soldiers seized and constrained to bear the cross after Christ.

SERMON XII.

THE POWER OF THE EYE.

“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.”—PSALM xxxii. 8, 9.

There may be some debate as to who should be considered the speaker of these words, whether the Psalmist or God Himself. You must often have observed in reading the Psalms, what a frequent change of persons there is, so that the sacred hymn has all the appearance of a conversation, carried on between various though undefined parties. And you should bear in mind, that the Psalms, having been composed for public worship, were used in services conducted by numerous ministers or performers: a voice from one side of the temple wakened a voice from another: chorus replied to chorus; and occasionally a single low strain was heard, as from the recesses of the sanctuary, breathing words which were listened to as from the oracle of God. It often surprisingly helps the interpretation of the Psalms, to observe the change of speakers, and to endeavor to determine who may have been personified by one, and who by another. Bishop Horsley, in his transla-

tion and arrangement of these beautiful hymns, has divided each into parts, and assigned to each part its speaker; and if you cannot, in every case, see the propriety of the division which he makes, you will yet in most find that division itself an admirable commentary on the hymn, the appropriation of the stanzas removing much obscurity, and elucidating the meaning.

In the instance of our text, the learned prelate supposes the first verse to proceed from the oracular voice which pronounced those parts of a psalm which were to be taken as spoken in God's name; the second he considers as the utterance of the Psalmist, addressing himself to the by-standers, who had heard this oracular voice. We do not know that it materially affects the force and beauty of the passage, whether we regard it as thus spoken partly by God and partly by David, or whether we consider it as proceeding wholly from either of the two. But perhaps the

bishop's supposition accords best with the character of the verses themselves ; and we shall therefore adopt it, so far as we may have occasion, in illustrating what is spoken, to make a reference to the speaker.

It is God, then, who may be considered as saying, whether to the Psalmist individually, or to every child of our race, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go ; I will guide thee with mine eye." There is here the promise of direction and protection, but a promise, as you will all see, whose fulfilment can take place only to the watchful and the meek. If there is to be instruction and teaching on the part of God, there must be a hearkening and an attentiveness on the part of man : the relation supposed is that between a preceptor and a scholar : and it is not enough that the preceptor be willing to impart knowledge, it is further required that the scholar be ready to receive it. And that a teachable disposition is supposed in those who are addressed by the oracular voice, you will further infer from the remainder of the utterance, "I will guide thee with mine eye." We shall, as we proceed, lay great stress on this expression ; it is a very singular one, and deserves the being most closely considered. At present it will be sufficient to observe to you, that if God is to guide us with his eye, to guide us, as it were, by a look, it is evident that there must be a watchfulness on our own part ; the voice of God might force attention, compelling even the careless to receive certain directions, but manifestly the eye of God can guide none but those who are diligently observing the lightest indications of his will. Hence, as we said before, whatsoever there be of gracious promise in the oracular utterance, is addressed to those only who possess and exercise a certain disposition, a disposition to receive and be on the watch for instruction. God does not promise that He will guide those who give no heed to quiet suggestions and gentle intimations, but those alone who are hearkening for instruction, and for whom a glance is sufficient.

And this being the scope and bearing of the words from the oracle, you will enter readily into the meaning of the following verse, considered as the address or advice of the Psalmist to the

by-standers, who are supposed to have been hearkening to the heavenly promise. A certain disposition had been described as essential to all who would have God for their leader : at least, if not explicitly described, it had been sufficiently intimated to be known by every hearer. The Psalmist, therefore takes occasion to deliver a warning against the opposite disposition—a disposition to yield only to harsh measures and severe discipline. "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle." You see that a contrast is intended between those who could be guided by the eye, and those who required the bit and the bridle. It is as much as to say, you have heard who those are who may expect the great privilege of being led by the Almighty, even such as may be said to be watching his countenance, that they may catch from it the least signs of his will. Take ye good heed, then, that ye be not careless and stubborn, resembling those beasts who need the rein and the muzzle, and whom nothing but actual force will keep in the right path, or prevent from doing mischief. If the promise of God be to those who are observant of his eye, what must their condition be, who care for nothing but his scourge ?

Here, then, we have before us a very interesting subject of discourse, in the opposite dispositions delineated by our text. We have said enough to put you in possession of the general idea, and we may now proceed to illustrations and inferences. We shall naturally arrange what we have to advance under the divisions suggested by the verses themselves. In the first place, we have to examine what may be gathered from the saying, "I will guide thee with mine eye : " in the second place, we have to consider what force this saying gives to the exhortation, "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule."

Now you will have already understood, that we regard guidance with the eye as proving great attentiveness in the party who is led, great anxiety to catch the wishes of the being who guides, and great readiness in obeying the lightest intimations of his will. We know very well that with a thoroughly obedient and affectionate child a look is

sufficient: he will not wait till the parent issue an actual prohibition, or impose an absolute command; he will take direction from a turn of the countenance, from a gesture, from a movement; and where he can do little more than guess what will be most acceptable, he will act on what is likely, rather than excuse himself by the want of more distinct information. And such a disposition it would appear to be, of which God in our text intimates his approval: the party whom He can lead with his eye, must be one who does not in every case demand express categorical instructions, but who, in the absence of these, will search out the slightest hints, the briefest intimations, and act carefully on what is probable, where there is nothing certain to direct him. We are inclined to think, for example, that much of the Bible, or at least of the New Testament, is constructed on the principle that it is with his eye that God would guide his Church, truths being often intimated rather than affirmed, left to be detected by an ever-watchful student, though not exposed to every cursory observer. And more than this—for the guidance of the eye may be yet more subtle and delicate—it may be that Scripture puts the probabilities on the side of a certain tenet or practice, when it cannot be affirmed that it places it beyond controversy; and if such a case occur, we suppose that those who are guided by the eye, will incline to the holding the tenet, or the adopting the practice, though they cannot plead express and positive command. The child may receive a letter from his parent, containing express directions as to certain points on which he needs teaching, but nothing very definite as to others on which he is in doubt. Of course he will not hesitate in regard of the first; he has there more than the guidance of the eye: and no excuse can be invented for his swerving from the will of his parent. But in regard of the last, the points on which the parent has given no express directions, there are two courses which he may pursue: he may refuse to act at all, unless he be furnished with explicit commands: or he may read the letter again and again, marking every turn of expression, and weighing word against word, anxious to see whether the mind of the parent may not be gathered from incidental notices,

or whether there be not reason to conclude that one course would be more agreeable to him than another. We should pronounce the child who acted in the latter manner, as distinguished from one who acted in the former, ready to be led by the eye as well as by the tongue; he is endeavoring, in the absence of words, to catch the looks of his father; and you will all admit that he hereby shows an amiableness and a warmth of affection which ought to secure for him a larger measure of parental regard.

Let us consider whether nothing of the like kind may be said in respect of that letter, the Bible, which our heavenly Parent has written to the Church. On far the greater number of points on which we require direction, the letter is so explicit and distinct, that if we remain ignorant or mistaken, it can only be through our own ignorance or wilfulness. And in respect of these, it is not to be said that God guides us with his eye: the instructions are express, written down and spoken so as to be known and read of all. But there are other points on which it would be quite idle to assert this explicitness of direction, but on which nevertheless there may be passing intimations, such as an affectionate observation will note, and a devoted obedience will follow. There may be material from which to infer which of two courses is the more likely to be acceptable to God, even where there is not enough for our fixing with certainty; and we should say that the man who acted on the likelihood, where he could not get the certainty, would deserve to be spoken of as guided by the eye, when he could not hear the voice. An instance is furnished, we think, in the matter of the baptism of infants. There can be no debate amongst those who are willing to take Scripture in its plain unvarnished sense, that baptism is the appointed rite of initiation into the Church of the Redeemer. Our Lord's directions on this matter are so strong and distinct, that we cannot be said to be guided merely by his eye, when we administer baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. But when we come to the question as to what parties may be duly made the subjects of this sacrament, we can no longer plead express and unequivocal

vocal direction. Of course, those who are of ripe age, and make satisfactory confession of faith, must on all hands be regarded as fit to be sprinkled with the regenerating waters. But what is to be said of children, too young themselves to know anything of Christianity, and who, if they profess faith at all, must do it by the mouths of parents or sponsors? You are aware that this has been a much litigated question: and though we of the Established Church enjoin the baptism of infants as "most agreeable with the institution of Christ," we do not profess to say that it is distinctly prescribed in the Bible. But perhaps there is the guidance of the eye, even if there be nothing more distinct. There may be some intimations from which to infer what will be most pleasing to Christ; and it will be the part of the affectionate and obedient to act upon these. We turn, then, to the New Testament: we find a very touching narrative of the bringing of young children to Jesus, that He might lay his hands upon them and bless them. The disciples rebuked those who brought them, no doubt imagining that only adults were fit subjects for their Master's benediction. But we are told that when Christ saw it, He was much displeased; He directed immediately that the children should be brought to Him; and then—a circumstance which indicates that they were very young, probably quite infants—"He took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them and blessed them."

Now, we are far enough from saying, that this beautiful incident furnishes decisive witness in favor of the baptism of infants: we have already intimated that we do not think that such witness is to be found in the Bible. But we certainly regard the incident as showing which of two things is the more likely to be agreeable to Christ: baptism is the instituted mode through which individuals are brought to Him to be blessed; and if He have not prescribed the age at which this sacrament may be administered, yet by blessing the very youngest, whilst He sojourned upon earth, He may be thought to have indicated that the very youngest are welcome, now that He has entered into heaven. There is no decisive argument here for the rigid controversialist, who

may tell us, and tell us truly, that the incident in question has no immediate or necessary connexion with baptism: but there is a very touching intimation to the earnest lover of his Lord, who is all anxiety to know what is likely to please Him best. In the absence of express command, I may learn something from that look of displeasure which Christ threw on those who would have kept infants from Him; and this we call being guided by the eye, where no voice can be heard; and we learn from our text, that it is by the eye, as well as by the voice, that God would have his Church instructed and led.

Neither is this a solitary instance of guidance by the eye, though we have not space to enlarge on any other. It is by the eye that we are guided to the keeping holy the first day of the week: if you will yield to nothing but a positive command for this observance, you will not find it in the New Testament; but if you can take indirect intimations, if you can act on what we may call the looks of your Master, you will have no difficulty in confessing the obligation of the Christian Sabbath.

We should be inclined to advance much the same statement in respect of Church government. We will not say that our own ecclesiastical system, though modelled after that of the early Church, is laid down with such precision in Scripture, that there cannot be debate as to its correctness and authority. So far as the Bible is concerned, it may not be by the voice of God that we are directed to have three orders in the ministry, the bishop, the priest, and the deacon. But if it be not by the voice, it may be by the eye, of God, that we are guided herein. You may not find in the New Testament such explicit directions in regard of an ecclesiastical constitution as leave no room for doubt; but there may be—and we thoroughly feel that there are—intimations, and allusions, and hints, which show a probability in favor of that constitution which we regard as apostolic: and ought not this probability, like the expression of the countenance of a well-beloved friend, to determine our conduct in the absence of direct command, whether by letter or speech?

It is the drift of all these observations on the indirect evidence which Scripture

may furnish to certain matters, whether of doctrine or discipline, to put you on your guard against a hard, dogmatical temper, a temper which will take nothing but on rigid demonstration, and rejects probability where it cannot gain certainty. There is a great difference between the proof which may be expected to convince a mere reasoner, and that which should suffice for the guidance of a warm-hearted disciple. If the child, to whose case we have before referred, were to put his parent's letter into the hands of a stranger, of a shrewd man of the world, who will look at nothing but its actual expressions, he might be told that there was very little in the document to which he could be required to attend. But the child himself, intent only on discovering the parent's mind, searches out notices which the stranger overlooks, and of which, when shown to him, he declares that he cannot see the obligation. It may be that the child might be held excusable in disregarding the notices, if the matter turned upon evidence, and nothing were binding which could not be mathematically proved. But the child's desire is simply to do what the parent will approve; and affection will make him keensighted, when, on the principles of logic, there may be nothing to point out a course. And you would all be ready to convict the child of a want of due love for his parent, if he treated the letter just as he might a series of geometrical demonstrations, admitting no conclusion unless he had established every step in the premises, and allowing no weight to any inference or suggestion which could not be made good by the strict rules of a syllogism.

We bid you therefore be on the watch, that you carry not to your daily reading of the Bible the temper which would be so ungracious in the supposed case of the child. If you are called upon to argue with the sceptical and disputatious, you must arm yourselves with the explicit statements which are meant for the hard and unbelieving; for it would be useless to adduce the indirect intimations, which belong only to the gentle and affectionate. But do not always, when you take up the Bible, take it up as men who have a battle to fight, and who must look out for weapons. Take it up as the letter from your Father which is in

heaven, a letter in which there may be hints as well as commands, wishes obscurely intimated as well as precepts unequivocally expressed. Take it up in the spirit of love and of simple anxiety to discover, that you may obey, the will of the Lord. Take it up, not that you may become more accomplished debaters, but more consistent disciples; and then, it may be, will a hundred little gentle and delicate allusions present themselves to your notice, home-touches which none but a Father can give, and none but a child can detect. Yea, you may come to feel, as you peruse the sacred page, not only as though you were hearkening to the voice, but as though you were studying the countenance of your Creator and Redeemer; and you will understand more and more of the beauty and power of the promise, "I will guide thee with mine eye."

Now all which we have advanced would probably have been strengthened, had we swerved a little from the strict order of our discourse, and brought the disposition, against which the Psalmist warns his hearers, into contrast with that which is indirectly commended by the voice from the oracle. Those who will yield to nothing but mathematical demonstrations, may be likened to animals who must be ruled by bridle and bit. There is in Scripture much that is adapted for the management of the restive and stubborn; but its general character is that of a document designed for the docile and meek; and accordingly much of its instruction will be missed, if you yield only to the hand, and will not follow the eye. We shall not, however, pursue this point further: we have probably said enough to put you on your guard as to the temper with which the Bible should be studied; and we must turn to other illustrations of our text, which are scarcely, if it all, of less interest and importance.

We would observe to you, that there are few doctrines with which the Christian would be less willing to part, than with that of a particular providence, a providence of which himself individually is unweariedly the object, so that the minutest thing which concerns him is noted and ordered from above. We all know how easy and common it is to throw contempt on this doctrine, and in so doing to assume all the appearance

of a zeal for God's honor, and of a dislike of human pride. It may be urged to be inconsistent with the majesty of the Supreme Ruler of the universe, that He should give a close attention to all the petty details of the life of some inconsiderable party: or it may be declared to savor of arrogance and presumption, to imagine that the trifling and every-day incidents which happen to ourselves, proceed in any measure from the direct appointment or interference of God. And we have no wish to deny that men have sometimes so spoken of a particular providence, and asserted such evidences in their own histories or cases, as to justify in a degree the ridicule which has been cast upon the doctrine. But, nevertheless, we feel quite warranted in holding, from the necessary attributes of God, and from the express statements of Scripture, that the Divine providence is as large as even imagination can make it, extending itself to every affair of every being throughout the peopled immensity. There cannot be to God, the infinite and uncreated, any of those differences between great and small which there are to ourselves; and if not even the sparrow can fall unobserved, who will suppose that there can be anything too insignificant to attract the notice, or engage the watchfulness, of the Universal Parent? We would have the Christian never ashamed of referring to God the most inconsiderable events, and of looking for his hand in what is thought trivial and ordinary. He is not degrading God, he is not forming an unworthy opinion of God, when he supposes that this mighty and inscrutable Being, who formed the universe at first, and who has ever since upheld and actuated its stupendous mechanism, is about his path, and about his bed, watching his every step, and noting his every want, just as though he alone were dependent on Deity, or alone needed the being tended by an ever-vigilant guardian. The unworthy opinion of God is entertained and exhibited, if he look for his hand only in some extraordinary occurrence, if he remove from his inspection what may be thought every-day trifles, and suppose it confined to events which may affect the whole course of life. This is just bringing God down to the level of man: for this is giving Him the same scale by which

to measure importance. Whereas, by supposing nothing too minute for the providence of God, we set Him immeasurably above ourselves, at a point so elevated, that He cannot recognize our distinctions, but regards as of equal dimensions what to our view appears vast and what inconsiderable.

And, therefore, let the Christian never fear that he may be offering an indignity to the majesty of God, if, in all the details of his business, and in all the management of his household, he be ever on the look-out for signs of the Divine presence, and if he expect to be taught and assisted from above, in directing common affairs, avoiding common dangers, and compassing common ends. He should rather fear that he may be offending that Being whose favor is life, if he ever think any thing so easy that it can be done in his own strength, or any thing so simple that his own wisdom will suffice. And we are quite assured—for this is the point to which these remarks are to bring you—that, if there be a habit of observing the indications of God's Providence, or of looking for his hand in daily occurrences, there will quickly be found evidence that He is indeed always at our side, that whatsoever happens to us proceeds from his appointment, and is removed, far as the east from the west, from what is called accident. If you do not cherish such a habit, you may have no consciousness of the interference of God except in some signal crisis, when a great disaster is permitted or averted, or when some great change passes over the whole aspect of your affairs. There are times in almost every man's history, at which he owns the workings of God, and events which force upon his notice the facts of the Divine Providence and government. But once possess yourselves of the doctrine of an universal Providence, and carry the doctrine with you into every-day life, resting on its truth, and looking for its evidence, and we can be sure, that, in the unravelling of little perplexities, in the scattering of little clouds, in the smoothing of little difficulties, in the communication of little benefits, you will find as convincing proof that an omniscient omnipresent Being is busied with your guidance, as though life were a series of miracles, and every moment saw you openly snatched from the jaws of a new

peril. And to those who accustom themselves in all humility to this tracing in every thing the Providence of God, there will be vouchsafed such guidance through the bearing of events, such intimations in the form and complexion of common occurrences, as will generally suffice to keep them in the best path, when less watchful persons would be at a loss for direction. He who is always noting the Divine Providence, will grow so used to its workings, as to be able, in a measure, to prepare for the future from what he has marked in the past and the present.

And it is all this which is so beautifully indicated by the promise of our text. It is not simply a promise that the eye of God shall be upon us; for that were only a declaration, however striking and expressive, of the universal Providence of Him who neither slumbers nor sleeps. It is a promise that we shall be guided by this eye: but such a promise supposes us to be looking at the eye: it is not enough for the purposes of guidance, that the eye be fixed on us: our own eye must also be fixed upon God: and it is only, so to speak, when the two eyes meet, that we can gather instruction as to the way in which to walk. And again must we remind you of the difference between the voice and the eye. If God promised to guide us with his voice, our being guided might not depend on our being always on the watch. The voice might force attention from the careless: it is not indispensable that we be always in a listening posture, in order to our catching the words of a speaker. But the case is altogether different, if we are to be guided by the eye. Here the looking posture is altogether indispensable; and it is only so far as this posture is rigidly maintained that we can learn from the directing glance which turn to take.

So that, if you dismiss for a moment the figurative expression, and think only on the truth which the emblem conveys, you are taught that those who would be led by their Maker, must be ever on the watch for intimations of his will, not expecting notices such as even the least observant must mark, but such rather as all but the vigilant may readily overlook. In the little turns and shiftings of everyday things, in the motions, as it were, of leaves, and in the fallings of the dew, must they be tracing the unwearied

Providence of the Almighty, and reading his directions to themselves. These are his glances, the expressions of his countenance, the movements of his eye. Oh! not when He is walking the heaven in his magnificence, robed in hurricane, and speaking in thunder, is He leading man with his eye; but rather when in the solitude of a cottage, He is showing some prayerful and simple-hearted peasant, to whom every sprig shoots by God, and every pin falls by God, how he may best extricate himself from a difficulty, or provide against a calamity. You know not how you are involving yourselves in perplexities, and depriving yourselves of comfort, through the not cultivating such a habit of communion with God, as would cause you to feel continually in his presence, and directed by his Providence. You oblige Him, as it were, to use harsh measures with you, to compel your attention by something startling and severe, because you will not observe those gentle indications of his nearness, those quiet suggestions of his will, which, like a gesture or a glance, are not the less expressive, because so tranquil and silent. And our earnest desire for you is, that you may not only be brought to the feeling that God's eye is ever upon you—for this might merely produce uneasiness, the sense of being watched—but that you may habitually be observant of that eye, so that, whilst it rests on you in unwearied inspection, yours may rest on it in unwearied expectation. You quite know, you quite feel, what would be meant, were we to speak of an individual as guided by the eye of a parent or kinsman. You would understand at once that the parent or kinsman, though he might occasionally deliver explicit directions, more frequently gave nothing but silent intimations, leaving his wishes to be gathered from minute signs, and momentary tokens, which would not escape the keenness of affection, though they might be wholly overlooked by the unattached hireling.

There is a great deal said as to the language of the eye: and if you think for a moment on the look which Christ cast upon Peter, when he had just uttered his third and vehement denial, a look which quite subdued the recreant Apostle, and sent him forth to seek a place where he might weep in an agony of shame and remorse, you will admit

that this language may indeed be marvellously powerful, and go as deep into the heart as the most penetrating that ever proceeds from the tongue. By and through this language, as we have just said, may a child or a friend be effectually guided; and you have no difficulty in understanding the terms, so to speak, on which the child and parent are, if we say that the looks of the one are sufficient for the direction of the other. And we wish that it might be thus between you and God. We wish that you might not be those cold and hard-minded servants, who must have every word written down before they will comply, and who think themselves required to do nothing for which there is not, in so many syllables, a direction which it is impossible to overlook or evade. We wish you rather to be like one of those devoted sons and daughters, who gaze on the countenance of the one whom they love and revere, eager to save him, as it were, the trouble of speaking, and to learn his wishes ere they can be breathed. We desire this for you, not merely because it is far better for you to stand to God in the relation of children than of servants, but because it is the Divine method to teach much through a look, and therefore you may remain uninstructed if you will take only words. There are striking and startling appointments of the Providence of God, and these are his voice; but there are noiseless and more common orderings of that Providence, and these are his glance. If you will only attend to the former, you will wander in a wrong path, till scared as by the shout of a foe: but if you are habitually regardful of the latter, you can scarcely fail to feel always under the leadings of a friend. For come with us now, and let us go with David to the oracle, that we may hear, in sounds breathed from the recesses of the sanctuary, in what way God will promise to lead on his people. We prostrate ourselves before the mysterious shrine, and we propose, in reverence and humility, our question as to the mode in which, sojourners as we are on earth, we may look to be directed by Him who dwelleth in the heavens. "Lord of all power and might, wilt Thou inform us of thy will, through the fearful tread of thy feet, as Thou dost pass through the fields of immensity; or through the

waving of thine arm, as Thou dost marshal before thee, and around thee, the troop of brilliant stars; or through the rushings of thy voice, heard above all human sound, whose whisper raised an universe, and could reduce it into nothingness? Is it thus, in modes which even the careless must observe, and the proud cannot mistake, that Thou wilt make known thy pleasure to those whom Thou dost love?" Nay—it is a still small voice which is breathed responsively from the oracle, the quietness of tone indicating the nature of the reply: and never henceforwards let us expect direction in our difficulties, and instruction in our ignorance, if we do not habituate ourselves to the momentarily waiting upon God, as those who feel, that in missing a glance, they may miss a lesson, seeing that the still small voice gives utterance to this promise, "I will guide thee with mine eye."

Now you cannot have failed to observe, that, throughout this examination into the promise of guidance which proceeds from the oracular voice, we have been insisting on the necessity of a meek and teachable disposition. The whole bent of our discourse has been towards the showing you, that the promise, made on God's part, supposes on our own a particular temper and habit, so that it can only take effect where this temper and habit exist. You cannot be too frequently reminded of this peculiarity in the passage—there cannot be guidance by the eye, unless there be constant attention in the one party, as well as constant superintendence in the other. And when you have observed that the promise virtually inculcates a particular disposition, the disposition of watchfulness, of readiness to note God's hand in the minutest occurrences, and to search out the lightest intimations of his will, you must feel the force of the Psalmist's admonition, which the oracular reply caused him to address to the by-standers. This admonition, as we have already remarked to you, warns against a disposition which is just the opposite to that which the promise requires. If guided by the eye, I am ready to follow the most gentle indication of the will of my leader; but I may refuse to be guided by the eye; I may give no heed to a look; and thus may I be like to the horse, and the mule, which have no un-

derstanding, and which will go only as compelled by the bit and the bridle.

And you must see, that, founded as the admonition is upon the promise, it is implied that God desires to direct us through quiet and tender dealings, and that, if He have recourse to harsher, it is because our obduracy and inattention render needful such treatment. There is something very affecting in this consideration: God only knows how much of severe discipline we bring upon ourselves, through refusing to be taught through the gentler. We now, you see, take guidance by the eye, as indicating a course of tender measures; for though undoubtedly there may be severity in a look, yet guidance by the eye, as contrasted with guidance by the bridle and the bit, must be considered as expressive of gentleness, in opposition to roughness and force. God, if we would but permit Him, would lead us by his eye, that eye which is the light of an extended creation, and from which, as it rests complacently upon them in their ardent waitings round his throne, the angel and the archangel draw their rich happiness. "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men:" and we might almost say—if we did not fear to attribute to God what consists not with his perfections—that the eye whose gentle glances we have refused to follow, is dimmed with tears, when the voice must speak sternly, and the hand rise in chastisement. But, alas! man, in the expressive language of the book of Job, is "born like the wild ass's colt;" and how is a look to tame what is so restive and ungovernable? The look is tried, but tried commonly without effect. The glance of the eye is in the warm sunbeam; and the smile of the face is on those many mercies which spread gladness and peace through unbroken families: but the sunbeam wakes no love to God, and the mercies fail to attract man to his Maker.

And what is to be done, when in vain hath God looked down from heaven, in vain turned upon us his eye of loving-kindness, hoping that we would mark its beaming emanations, and trace them back till we were lost in Himself? Shall He leave us to run unrestrained in the wilderness, goaded by our own passions, and hastening to perdition? He loves us too well for this: He would not have

us perish without an effort for our deliverance. But since gentle means have failed, He must now adopt harsh: the hand must be tried, where the eye has not succeeded, and the bridle be fastened, where the look has been scorned. We pretend not to say that this might be illustrated from the history of every individual: but probably the cases are far more frequent than are commonly supposed, in which the guidance of the bit has been made necessary by disobedience to the guidance of the eye. Why has poverty come, like an armed man, on an individual who was long blessed with prosperity? Ah! the prosperity which was nothing but the graciousness of God's countenance, did not lead Him to the Author and Giver of every good gift and of every perfect; and therefore is adversity being tried: perchance that hard dealing will turn him from the world, and direct him towards heaven. Why has affliction come heavily on that mother, who had garnered up her heart in her only son, and now must see him carried out to the grave? Ah! her child, in whom, as the sunny smile played upon his face, she ought to have viewed the reflected glance of her Maker, wooing her to Himself, did but bind her to the present world, in place of pointing her to a brighter: and now she who gave no heed to that look of Divine tenderness which was embodied in her cherub-like boy, must undergo the harsh processes of constraint and correction, if peradventure they may guide her to Him who wounds only that He may heal.

It would not of course become us, as we have already implied, to conclude, in every case where we see the bridle employed, that it is employed only because the eye has not been watched and obeyed. But still, when you observe how express are the assertions of Scripture as to the unwillingness of God to apportion pain to his creatures, you must allow that suffering is permitted because nothing but suffering will suffice; and you may suppose, that, in general, the harsh measure is not likely to be tried, till the gentle has been tried without success.

And this is simply what we think indicated by the promise in the first verse of our text, when taken in connexion with the admonition in the second. We leave you to draw for yourselves the practical inferences from our previous illustrations

of the promise in question. We leave you to conclude the necessity of a prompt and teachable temper, if you would study the Scriptures with profit, the temper of those who are perusing a document from one whom they love, who are anxious only to ascertain his wishes, and who are therefore as ready to act upon hints as upon explicit commands. Neither do we stay now to insist further on the importance of seeking God's help in the very smallest things, and of striving to trace the leadings of his Providence in simple, every-day occurrences. But this fresh view of the promise, obtained from regarding it in connexion with the Psalmist's admonition, is so rife with touching interest and instruction, that we must entreat you to be steadfast in its contemplation, and faithful in its remembrance. If we would preserve our blessings, we must see to it that these blessings conduct us to God. This is the inference, this the lesson. We may consider mercies as the beamings of the Almighty's eye, when the light of his countenance is lifted up upon us; and that man is guided by the eye, whom mercies attract and attach to his Maker. But oh! let us refuse to be guided by the eye, and it will become needful that we be curbed with the hand. If we abuse our mercies, if we forget their Author, and yield Him not gratefully the homage of our affections, we do but oblige Him, by his love for our souls, to apportion us disaster and trouble. Complain not, then, that there is so much of sorrow in your lot; but consider rather how much of it you may have wilfully brought upon yourselves. Listen to the voice of God, "I will guide thee with mine eye"—mine eye whose glance gilds all that is beautiful, whose light disperses all darkness, prevents all danger, diffuses all happiness. And why then is it that ye are sorely disquieted? why is it that "fear and the pit" are so often upon you; that one blessing after another disappears from your circle; and that God seems to deal with you as with the wayward and unruly, on whom any thing of gentleness would be altogether lost? Ah! if you would account for many mercies that have departed, if you would insure permanence to those that are yet left, examine how deficient you may hitherto have been, and strive to be more diligent for the future, in obeying an admonition which

implies that we should be guided by the soft lustres of the eye, if our obduracy did not render indispensable the harsh constraints of the rein, "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle."

And, now, have we any other illustration to offer of our text, or any other inference to deduce from it, whether of doctrine or reproof? Indeed, we know not that there yet remains any other important view of a passage which, though easily overlooked, seems to us amongst the most touching and expressive to be found in the Bible. But in pondering the words on which we have discoursed, and considering their bearings on other parts of Scripture, we could not help connecting them with that awful cry in the book of Revelation, which is uttered by the impenitent when overtaken by judgment, and which passionately invokes shelter from the rocks and the hills, that there may be concealment from the face of Him who sits upon the throne. We are always much struck at the power thus ascribed to the face. It is said of the Judge, in a most sublime expression, "From whose face the earth and the heaven fled away;" and it is from the face, as we have just quoted, that the shrieking crowd implore the being hid. It is as though a look would then be enough: there will be no need for the tongue: the eye will condemn, and send forth consternation throughout the hosts of the rebellious. And if God be ready now to guide us with his eye, and if hereafter, supposing us to follow some other leader, we shall shrink from his eye, have we not an exemplification of retributive justice, an evidence how thoroughly abused mercies, and neglected privileges, will rise up as witnesses against us, so that the Divine dealings with us here shall have only to be arrayed, in order to our sinking, self-sentenced, into the pit of the lost? The eye which is upon the sinful now to conduct, will be upon them to condemn; and however easy it may be to resist the guidance of that eye whilst it beams forth in tenderness, it will be impossible to withstand its decree of banishment when lit up with anger. Yes, it may be the terrible thing at the judgment, to be forced to look on our benefactor, to behold Him face to face, to meet his eye! Any thing rather than this—even now,

if we have been ungrateful to a friend, if we have slighted his kindness and repaid it with injury, we are troubled by his glance, and would do much to avoid the reproachful yet sorrowful expression of his countenance. And to see hereafter that gracious Being who has unweariedly studied our good, who has spared no pains that He might turn us from evil, who has striven by all imaginable means to lead us to happiness, to see Him, and know Him, with the frown upon his brow—terror of terrors! Even love is armed against us, and we

feel in an instant all the anguish of despair. "Be ye not as the horse or as the mule,"—with what emphasis come these words, when we think on the eye of God as passing sentence, by its glance of reproach, on the scornful and the obdurate. "I will guide thee with mine eye"—can these gracious syllables be ever taken as a threat? Alas! yes. That eye would now guide you, by its look of love, to the kingdom of heaven; but resist it, and that eye shall direct you, by its look of wrath, to the "fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

SERMON XIII.

PILATE'S WIFE.

"When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him."—*Matt. xxvii. 19.*

We need hardly tell you that these words have reference to Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, by whose direction or consent our blessed Lord was crucified. There have been many disputes in regard of certain parts of Pilate's conduct; but all seem to agree in condemning him, on the whole, as having acted with signal injustice. He would seem to have been a weak as well as a wicked person: at least, his wickedness forced him to assume all the appearance of weakness—for having irritated and disgusted the Jewish people, over whom he was set, by extortion and cruelty, he was in dread lest their complaints should procure his removal from his government; and therefore he did not dare to thwart their will, even when acknowledging to himself its baseness and unreasonableness. You observe, throughout the whole account of Pilate's deal-

ings with Christ, that he was thoroughly satisfied as to the innocence of the prisoner, and the malice of his accusers. The more he examined Him, the more does he seem to have deepened in the conviction that there was no fault in Him, and to have become anxious to procure his enlargement. And when at length he yielded, and gave up Jesus to the will of his persecutors, it was avowedly because overborne by the cry for his destruction, and in no degree because persuaded of his being worthy of death.

There never perhaps was a more singular scene than that exhibited when the governor surrendered up our Lord. Wishing to show by a most significant action his firm belief in the innocence of Christ, Pilate "took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just

person : see ye to it." What a scene ! the judge acquits the prisoner, and at the same time delivers Him to death. He wishes to have no share in the murder about to be committed, though it could not be committed but by his order or concurrence. Alas ! for human inconsistency : Pilate is not the only man, who whilst sinning against conscience, has contrived some excuse, and thought both to do the deed and prevent its consequences.

But how striking was the testimony given to our Lord. He was to die as a malefactor : but who ever died as a malefactor, before or since, with the judge's verdict in his favor of his being a "just person ?" It was wondrously ordered by God, that the enemies of Christ should be witnesses to his righteousness. Judas, who betrayed Him, could furnish no accusation, and hanged himself through remorse when He saw Him condemned. Pilate who allowed his crucifixion, stood forward amongst the multitude who were clamorous for his death, and declared, even whilst consenting to their wish, that He who called Himself their King had done nothing to justify his being made their victim. But the testimony thus borne to the Redeemer, however irresistible, in no degree takes off from the sin of those, who, having given it, were accessory to his death. Indeed, so far as Pilate is concerned, it is very evident that what makes him immeasurably guilty, is the consciousness, which he took no pains to conceal, of the perfect innocence of Christ. Had he had his doubts, had he felt, that, though appearances were in favor of our Lord, there were circumstances of which the Jews were better judges than himself, and which might perhaps warrant his condemnation, there would have been some shadow of excuse for his yielding to the importunity of the priests and the people. But not a syllable of the kind can be alleged. The Roman governor was as certain of Christ's innocence as of his own existence : he had not the remotest suspicion that He might be guilty of anything which merited death : and therefore, in suffering Him to be crucified, he passed his own condemnation, and registered his sentence as wilfully unjust, having by his vices so placed himself in the power of the wicked, that, in spite of the upbraidings

of conscience, he must join them in their wickedness.

We speak, you observe, of the upbraidings of conscience : for the observable thing is, that this great principle was not dormant in Pilate, but, on the contrary, acted with faithfulness and vigor. Whatever the sensuality and tyranny of this Roman, he had evidently not succeeded in silencing conscience : he had not reached the state, sometimes reached by the wicked, when wrong actions seem preceded by no repugnance, and followed by no remorse. Through all the proceedings against Jesus in which he had part, there was manifestly a great struggle in his breast ; and it was only a sense of danger, the fear of offending the people, and of giving ground for an accusation of neglect of the interests of Cæsar, which finally prevailed against the sense of what was right, and induced him to consent to the crucifixion of Christ. And this it is, as we have said, which fixes upon Pilate so enormous a criminality. Though backed by his legions so that he might have repressed any tumult excited by his refusal to do wrong, he knowingly and wilfully committed an act of monstrous injustice and cruelty, in the hope of obtaining a transient popularity, or averting a momentary anger. He could hardly have been ignorant that the very multitude, which were now vociferating "Crucify him, crucify him," had, but a few days before, rent the air with their hosannahs as Christ entered Jerusalem ; and he might therefore have calculated that, if he shielded Jesus for a while from the popular fury, he should see Him again the object of the popular favor. But no : he would run no risk : and, therefore, like many others who sacrifice the future to the present, he crushed his conscience and himself by the same desperate act.

Neither is this all : we do not think that the enormity of Pilate is to be estimated from the mere resistance of conscience. There is a circumstance in the narrative of this guilty man, which scarcely seems to us to obtain its due share of attention, but which, in our view of the matter, aggravates immeasurably his crime. And this is the circumstance related in our text, which is omitted indeed by the other Evangelists, and re-

ceives no comment even from St. Matthew. At the very moment that he sat down on the judgment seat, already persuaded of the innocence of Christ, but perplexed by the clamor of the multitude, there came to Pilate a message from his wife, a message of entreaty and warning, declaratory of her having had some fearful dream or vision in reference to Christ, and beseeching him to take no measures against that just or righteous man. We know nothing in regard of Pilate's wife—she may have before been inclined to the receiving Jesus as a Prophet; or, which is the more probable, she may have known or cared nothing respecting Him, till, through a supernatural visitation, she learnt his innocence, and the peril of acting as his enemy. This is comparatively unimportant. It is certain that God specially interfered to work in her mind conviction on these points, and that she in consequence sent a distinct and urgent message to her husband, which reached him at the critical moment when he was inclined to waver between what he felt to be duty, and what he thought to be interest. There is nothing told us as to the manner in which Pilate received the communication. But forasmuch as he is described as taking increased pains afterwards to prevail on the multitude to forego their bloody purpose, we may suppose that it was not without effect; but that, corroborating his own conviction, it added to his earnestness to deliver Christ, and therefore to his guiltiness, when he nevertheless abandoned Him.

And this, as we have stated, is, in our view, the most singular circumstance in what is narrated of Pilate, the most remarkable in itself, and the most condemnatory of the unjust and dissolute judge. We do not know whether we shall be able to make palpable to you all the instructiveness and energy contained in an incident to which you may not have been wont to attach much importance. But we will make the endeavor: we will consider God as acting upon Pilate to deter him from committing a great crime, and therefore to leave him inexcusable in the commission; and we will strive to show you—and that too in a manner which shall bring certain great practical lessons home to yourselves—how this was emphatically done, when

the wife of the Roman governor sent to tell him of her vision, and to beseech him that he would abstain from all violence against that righteous man Christ.

Now there is unquestionably a difficulty in reconciling the foreknowledge, and yet more the purposes of God with the free agency, and therefore with the responsibility of man. It certainly is not easy, and perhaps with our contracted powers not possible, to understand how men can be fully independent in the doing, and therefore thoroughly chargeable with the doing, things on which God has long before determined, so that they are instruments in his hands, and yet at the same time free agents, following their own wills, and answerable for all the consequences. But there is abundant evidence from Scripture, and also from the nature of the case, that there is no human action which is not foreseen by God, which is not indeed so definitely pre-ascertained that it can be reckoned on as though fixed by an absolute decree, but which, all the while, does not spring from the unbiassed human will, unbiassed, we mean, in such sense as to acquit God altogether of being the author of evil. We are to be especially careful that we never reject either one of two truths, because we may be unable to prove their consistency: for the harmony of two truths is itself a third truth; and whilst our faculties may be competent to the determining the two, they may fail us when we would advance to determine the third. The foreknowledge, and pre-determination of the Almighty—this is a truth which reason and revelation concur in setting forth. The liberty of human actions, so that each of us is decided by his own will what to do, and what to forbear—this is another truth, demonstrable from the same sources, and on the same testimony. But the third truth—namely, that these truths are, as all truths must be, perfectly consistent the one with the other—we may, or may not, be able satisfactorily to establish this: but then you must all see that our inability to advance to a higher demonstration, or to give proof on a more intricate point, in no degree affects what has been already determined, but rather leaves in their integrity the positions which we succeeded in reaching.

You will find it very important to bear this in mind in the study of Scripture : for men are apt to think that they must not only establish separate truths, but prevail to the showing how harmoniously they combine : and if baffled in this latter endeavor, they will take it as evidence of something wrong in their previous conclusions. Whereas this is far enough from being necessarily the case : they may have been quite right in the respective things determined, though those things form a paradox which they are not able to remove : a paradox is not necessarily a contradiction, but may consist of true affirmations, each demonstrable on its own grounds, though there may be appearance of opposition between the two.

And in regard to the particular case which has given rise to these remarks, you have evidence the most decisive, that God has nothing to do with causing the wicked actions which He overrules or employs, but that all the guilt rests with men, even when they appear indispensable to the bringing round a Divine purpose. You can imagine nothing more fixed or predetermined, than that Christ should be rejected by his own nation, and finally put to death through their instrumentality. To suppose the Jews receiving, in place of rejecting, their Messiah, acknowledging his pretensions, and giving Him their allegiance instead of their scorn, is apparently to suppose the Divine plan frustrated, and the whole scheme of our redemption brought to a stand. Yet you know that Christ continued to the end entreating his countrymen, endeavoring by every possible means to lead them to repentance, dealing with them as with those who were perfectly free to own Him as their Savior, and whose unbelief He ardently longed to overcome. And you cannot doubt the thorough honesty, if we may use the word, of all the entreaty and exhortation brought to bear upon the Jews ; though you may have a difficulty in understanding how they could be employed in the face of a known certainty that the Jews would persevere in their wickedness, and that such perseverance was the appointed instrumentality through which would be wrought the oblation of Christ. It is equally true that God reckoned, so to speak, on the wicked-

ness of the Jews, so that, in one sense, you might call their wickedness fixed or unavoidable ; and that He acted towards them as quite free to choose, so that, in another sense, their wickedness must have been altogether wilful. And if you are perplexed by any appearance of contrariety between these statements, you are not, on that account, as we have already explained, to cast doubt on either the one or the other ; for the truths of the wickedness having been so foreknown that it might be reckoned on as an instrument, and of its having been so voluntary that it was wrought against remonstrance, and that remonstrance as sincere as it was urgent, rest each on unquestionable grounds, and are noways affected by any difficulty in the proof of their agreement.

And you have an equally, if not a more, striking instance in the history of Pilate. It was not enough, as you all know, that Jesus should die ; He was to die as a criminal, that He might exhaust our curse through being made a curse for us. And He had Himself expressly marked out crucifixion as the mode of his decease : so that to suppose Him put to death in any other manner would be to suppose prophecy defeated, and redemption unaccomplished. But He could not have been crucified except through the instrumentality of the Romans ; for it was a Roman, and not a Jewish, mode of execution, and required, in the largest sense, the authority of the governor. So that here you have a case in which you might almost say that the wickedness of an individual was indispensable to the purposes of God. You cannot see how the plan of human deliverance could have gone forward, on the supposition that Pilate had been firm in defending our Lord. It rested altogether with Pilate whether or no Christ should be crucified : and it rested, so to speak, on the crucifixion, whether or no the world should be redeemed. And nevertheless there was no leaving Pilate to himself, no withdrawing from him the ordinary agencies through which God is wont to influence the will of his creatures. On the contrary, extraordinary agency was employed in addition to ordinary, as though God had resolved to try every possible means of withholding Pilate from the

sin which you pronounce indispensable; it was not enough that conscience should be in full play, though this of itself might have proved that God was not the author of the evil which He made subservient to his purposes—a supernatural vision was vouchsafed, and God actually departed from the common course of his providence, that He might warn the wavering Roman, and strengthen him to do right.

We do not know that you can anywhere find a more singular fact. On the one hand, you have the whole scheme of redemption dependent, we may say, on Pilate's ordering the crucifixion of Christ; on the other, you have a direct interference of God, to procure that Pilate should order his release. There is no denying the appearance of contradiction; but the known attributes of God are our pledge that there is but the appearance, and not the reality. We must again have recourse to the rule which has been established, and not think it reason for questioning either of two truths, that we cannot prove their agreement, which is a third and a deeper. It was foreknown by God—and the foreknowledge made the event as certain as a positive decree—that Pilate would yield to the clamor of the Jews, and surrender Christ to their malice. But this did not prevent God from using extraordinary as well as ordinary means to procure the opposite result, and keep back Pilate from the commission of an aggravated sin. You may find it difficult to understand how the foreknowledge could consist with the endeavor to prevent; but both are definitely stated; and neither is affected by an apparent opposition to the other.

And the great practical truth which ought to be derived from such an instance is, that, however our actions have been foreknown and overruled by God, we shall be answerable for them, as resulting from our own will, and wrought in opposition to sufficient warning and instruction. God foreknows which of you will perish; and He may reckon on the final impenitence of any one in this assembly as a fixed, inevitable thing, and employ it in some way as an instrument for the effecting his purposes. But nevertheless that individual is under no invincible constraint: he is free to choose: and his final impenitence will

result only from his own refusal to be saved. And to make this clear, clear hereafter before angels and men, God, you may be sure, will act on that individual through the agencies of his Gospel, not letting him alone because bent on destruction, but plying him with warnings that he may be left without excuse. The mere foreknowledge can have no effect on the man's actions: if it operated at all, it could only be as withholding God from imparting assistances which He foresaw would be of no avail. But it does not thus operate: God evidently acts towards you as if He foreknew nothing of your penitence or impenitence, but had only the part of a moral governor to perform, who would furnish his subjects with every inducement to do right, and cut off from them every excuse for doing wrong. You may wonder how God can thus, as it were, in one sense make no use of his foreknowledge, whilst in another He is ordering all his purposes by its showings; and you may feel, and perhaps with great justice, that no created being could persevere in using the same means, where sure to fail, and where sure to succeed. But God is not a created being: his ways are not our ways, neither are his thoughts our thoughts. And you are to believe, however unable you may be to solve the questions which the fact will suggest, that God takes means to provide for its being proved at the judgment, that those very actions, which He had all along foreseen and ordained to overrule, were wrought in despite of the remonstrance of his Spirit, and in opposition to as much of restraining agency as could possibly consist with human accountability.

It will be impossible then, for any one to take refuge in God's foreknowledge of his sins, as having made them unavoidable. The case of Pilate is a witness; and we may regard it as written to prevent our entertaining the false hope. You can imagine no instance in which a man might more speciously plead, that there lay a constraint upon him, or that he was under a kind of necessity to commit a great sin. What, when the sin was to be instrumental to the redemption of humankind, when it had entered from all eternity into the calculations of God, so that its preven-

tion would have deranged the whole scheme of deliverance, is the perpetrator to be visited with vengeance, as though there were nothing to excuse him in the predeterminations of which the sin was the subject? Nay, there was nothing to excuse him. He was not forced to commit the sin through its being foreknown that he would commit it. The foreknowledge left him as free as though there had been no foreknowledge. It laid no weight upon conscience; for conscience was in full vigor, and remonstrated with all the energy of the vicegerent of God—ay, and as though this had not been enough, but the guilty Roman might have still pleaded that there was not sufficient motive to withhold him from the foreknown commission, God departed from every ordinary rule, interfered in a supernatural manner, and caused that, so soon as Pilate took his place on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him to tell him of a vision respecting Christ, and to beseech him that he would have nothing to do with that just or righteous man.

But we will now pass from the more intricate to the simpler parts of our subject, exhorting you, however, to ponder at your leisure the very remarkable evidence which is furnished to your being accountable for actions which God foresees and overrules, by there having been a Divine interposition to withhold Pilate, if possible, from crucifying Christ. We wish now to bring you to observe how the method used by God was eminently fitted to prevail with the Roman governor, and how, therefore, it cut off all excuse when he gave up Jesus to the multitude.

It may at once occur to you as in some respects singular, that the vision was to Pilate's wife, and not to Pilate himself. Why was there this indirect communication? Why, when the object was to influence the mind of the governor, was he not himself startled by portentous dreams, and scared by terrible imagery, flitting to and fro in the silence of the night? Would not the admonitions have been more likely to prevail, if thus directly conveyed with every fearful accompaniment, than when received second-hand, and therefore necessarily divested of what gave them their impressiveness? We can only say, that this would greatly depend on points in Pilate's character

with which we have not full acquaintance, and that we are bound to conclude that God took the course which was best adapted, on the whole, to the circumstances of the case. You are to observe that, as the supernatural message came through Pilate's wife, there may have been furnished a double motive to the governor: in addition to obedience to the vision, there may have been the desire of pleasing the party to whom it had been granted: and thus the inducement, when you take the two things together, may have been stronger than had the dream been that of Pilate himself. The attachment of Pilate to his wife may have been great: they may have been knit together by the bonds of a very close affection: and on such a supposition, it is possible, and even probable, that the terrors of the vision would have been more effective upon Pilate, as conveyed to him through the tears and entreaties of her whom he loved, than had they burst upon him in their unearthliness, with all the demonstrations of superhuman agency. It would not necessarily be so in every case: but it is altogether supposable that it might be so in a case of strong personal attachment: and since we have nothing from which to conclude that this does not define the case of Pilate and his wife, we must be warranted in thinking that God took the course which He adopted, because the Roman governor was most accessible through the channel of his affections.

And it is on such a supposition, and under such a point of view, that the incident in question is most replete with what is striking and instructive. We have already said enough to prove to you that God, in his dealings with Pilate, was providing for his own vindication, storing up the material of evidence that this Roman sinned against light and conviction, and therefore brought upon himself all the guiltiness of actions which were to subserve the most glorious of purposes. Since the foreknown wickedness of Pilate was to be instrumental to the greatest end which even God Himself had ever proposed—the rescue of this fallen creation—it would seem to have been important that this wickedness should be clearly shown to have been altogether wilful, resulting entirely from the depravity of the creature, and

not at all from the determination of the Creator. It was not therefore thought sufficient, that conscience should give forth its utterances with more than common distinctness: God would do something which should leave no place for cavil, and which, if Pilate could withstand it, would but prove that nothing consistent with human accountableness would have withheld him from crucifying Christ. And what shall this be? Something supernatural undoubtedly: for God had before acted upon men through visions and apparitions; and, therefore, whilst these were tried, it could hardly be affirmed that the utmost had been done in the instance of Pilate. Shall then a spirit pass before Pilate, as one had passed before Eliphaz, causing his knees to tremble, and the hair of his flesh to stand up? or shall one of the dead be disquieted, and rise as rose Samuel in the cave of the sorceress? Indeed, there shall be the employment of vision, and imagery of terror shall be used to impress the fearfulness of taking part against Christ. But nevertheless, the spirit shall not pass before Pilate himself, and the forms of terror shall not meet his own troubled gaze. God seeks to make the communication yet more effective than it could be made by the wild phantom and the mysterious voice; and therefore He makes it not to Pilate, but to Pilate's wife, to whom he was linked by very strong attachment. He made his final effort on this Roman—the effort which was to give convincing demonstration at the judgment of Pilate's inexcusableness—through the medium of his affections, calculating that there would be less power in the apparition itself, than in the effect of that apparition on one tenderly beloved; and that even if Pilate might throw off the influence of a vision as sent in awfulness to himself, he would yield to it when presented in the fears and beseechings of her who had his heart. And if this be a true account of the proceeding in question; if it were to Pilate's wife, rather than to Pilate himself, that the vision was sent, because the assault was thus through his affections, and the man, not accessible through his affections, may be given up as lost; indeed we shall have no difficulty in showing the repetition of the case, and drawing inferences which should go home to many in this assembly.

It is far, very far from an unfrequent thing, that God causes his warnings and reproofs to be conveyed, so to speak, through the channel of the affections. It is the case, in a measure, whensoever one member of a family is religiously impressed, and studies to convey the impression to the rest. It is the case when parents strive to train their children in the fear of God; for all the filial feelings may then be said to be enlisted on the side of piety. It is the case when children are beyond their parents in godliness, so that Christianity is carried to the father and the mother through the beautiful examples, and the modest statements, of the son or the daughter. It is yet more emphatically the case, when either the husband or the wife is stirred with anxiety for the soul, and beseeches the other to take heed of crucifying the Son of God afresh. There is no denying the commonness of these cases: they are continually occurring in every neighborhood, and we are quite sure that examples of each kind might be found amongst yourselves. And we wish you to understand, that, whensoever they occur, God may be regarded as making a special effort to overcome impenitence and unbelief, and as employing an engine which is among the last and most powerful that He ever brings to bear upon men. If He make no way when He attacks through the affections, it is hardly to be expected that He will ever prevail: there remains no more likely method: and the probability is, that the great moral change will never be wrought.

We would press this on the attention of those of you whose circumstances may at all bring them under our foregoing descriptions. Children who have religious parents—God has sent the vision of immortality to those who gave you life, and not, in the first instance, to yourselves: but this is because there is no channel through which Christian truths can reach you so advantageously as through that of parental instruction, through the warm words of a father, or the warmer tears of a mother: and you are to bethink yourselves, that, if the truths, thus communicated, fail to make impression, you are not to reckon on any mightier instrumentality. Parents, again, who have religious children, into whose households piety has gained en-

trance, but not through yourselves—the dream, which has given warning of the peril of neglecting the soul, has not invaded your own slumber, but that of those in whom you have garnered up the heart: and you are to consider that this course has been followed, because there was less probability of your resisting the claims of the Gospel, as presented to you by the objects of deep love. If, then, you can be irreligious with religion personified in a son or a daughter, alas! we can scarcely dare hope that you will ever be won over to God. And the husband, who is yet devoted to the present perishable world, but whose wife has been roused to provide for eternity, and who tells him of those visions of the future which startled her from her lethargy, and entreats him to join with her in fleeing wrath to come—we see in this man not one from whom God withholds the vision, but rather one to whom He sends it in the mode best adapted to convince: and if it be to no purpose that she, to whom he is bound by the closest of human ties, becomes to him, as it were, the medium of communication from the invisible world, the minister may well fear that his preaching will be vain, and that he shall never be gladdened by that husband's conversion.

We are advancing nothing at variance with the important truth which we often feel it necessary to press on your attention, namely, that it is through the public ministrations of the Gospel that God ordinarily turns men from darkness to light. We are only sketching to you a result of those public ministrations, and considering its effects on others beside its more immediate subjects. And we are bound to tell you, that we look with the most melancholy apprehension on that family or household, one of whose members has been converted through the preaching of the word, whilst the others continue careless and worldly-minded. At the first moment, we hail with delight the conversion of one, and eagerly anticipate that the little leaven will leaven the whole lump. But when we observe that no salutary effect is wrought upon the mass, we have less hope than ever that good will be accomplished through future preachings of the Gospel, and almost regard the unconverted members as shut up to

final impenitence. It has to us all the air of a last attempt, when the preacher has been enabled to overcome the unbelief of some one in the household, and so may be said to have sent that one as his messenger to the rest, to warn and to beseech them not to fight against God. It is the attempt through the affections—the attempt upon Pilate through the entreaties and forebodings of his wife. There may be other attempts, and—for there is nothing too hard for the Lord—the strongholds of unbelief may yet be cast down. But as a general rule, we believe, that, where vital religion has made way into a household, and does not spread, there is cause for a more than common fear that it has won its only victory. When the parent is converted, but can effect nothing against the ungodliness of the child; when the child is converted, but sets in vain before the parent the truths of Christianity; when the wife hearkens to the summons of the Gospel, but cannot persuade the husband to be one with her in seeking rest beyond the grave; or the husband renounces the world, but cannot induce the wife to join him in breaking away from its fascinations—oh, it may seem a harsh thing to say, but the child, or the parent, or the husband, or the wife, who can thus resist the claims of religion, when urged through the channel which goes directly to the heart, appears to us to be closing up the last path of escape, and almost insuring the dying unconverted. Depend upon it, it is a fearful thing to have your affections engaged, so to speak, on the side of religion, and yet religion to gain no hold on your affections.

Let this be pondered, we entreat, by those of you who may be conscious to themselves that they are being attacked through what we define as the avenue of the affections. Let them not think that it might be better for them if they were acted on more immediately through the ministrations of the Gospel; so that, as the preacher launched forth his oratory, the terrors of the future world might crowd their imaginations, and the Judge of humankind rise before their vision, seated awfully on his throne of fire and of cloud. Let them rather think, that it may be on account of its greater probable efficiency, that God tries the method of rousing a near kinsman, and

then employing that kinsman to operate upon them, so that, in withstanding this process of attack, they only show that no other would prevail. And let them consider whether this may not be illustrated by the instance of Pilate, Pilate of whom we may say that God designed to use the strongest possible means of withholding him from the guilt of crucifying Christ, and yet of whom we read, not that his own slumber was broken by a supernatural visitation, but only that, when he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him to tell him of an agonizing dream, and to beseech him to have nothing to do with that righteous man Christ.

But now we would wish you to observe how greatly it increased the criminality of Pilate, that the message of his wife reached him at the very moment of his taking his place on the judgment seat. It would seem that he had left his palace without hearing any thing of the dream—nay, that the dream had not then been vouchsafed—for you will observe how the communication runs, “I have suffered many things *this day* in a dream because of him.” The dream had not come in the night, the ordinary season for such modes of revelation, but in the day—so that there was probably something altogether supernatural about the vision, leaving no room for doubt in Pilate’s wife that God had indeed interfered to attest Christ’s innocence, and to give warning as to the danger of using Him injuriously. And Pilate, receiving so sudden and unexpected a message, must have more strongly felt a Divine interposition, than had he heard in the morning some marvellous story of a strange impression on the mind during the usual hours of sleep. He must have perceived that something extraordinary had happened: the vision had evidently been so timed, that the tidings might reach him when he could least question their authority, and stood most in need of their import. And this, as we have said, greatly heightens Pilate’s guilt: whatsoever power the vision could have, was brought to bear upon him at the precise moment when he most required aid: and you may see that the whole thing was ordered, so as to afford him the strongest possible assurance that there had come a warning from God, and to afford it him when

it was most likely to strengthen him to do right.

Of course, it would in a measure palliate his conduct, if you could show that he had reason to doubt the fact of a supernatural communication, or if there had been nothing to force the fact on his attention at the exact moment when conscience required an auxiliary. But though he had no power of examining the alleged communication, it was impossible for him not to feel that something very singular had occurred. His wife, whom he had left but a short time before, undisturbed by any thoughts as to Christ, would never have sent him so strange a message and entreaty, had there not been actually what looked like the interference of God: and it was precisely when his own convictions were urging him to release Christ, that there came to him a testimony to his innocence, which ought itself to have nerved him to the resisting the popular will.

We quite believe that the same accurate timing of warning and admonition is to be traced in the experience of all, so that, if any one of you would carefully observe how things fall out when he is exposed to temptation, he would find proof that God sends him seasonable aids, and disposes events to the strengthening him to resist and overcome. Certainly, if He took care that Pilate should receive a message, just as he ascended the tribunal whence he would be tempted to deliver a wrong verdict, He will not leave without the appropriate assistance any of those, who, being brought into perilous circumstances, are sincerely desirous to keep unsullied their Christian profession. And in regard of others, who are “led captive by Satan at his will,” they have often to overcome obstacles which seem thrown suddenly, and as of set purpose, in the way of their attaining the gratification of their passions. They have only to note the difficulties which unexpectedly arise, and warn them back from some object on which they are bent, to confess that it is as though an invisible Being watched the opportunity, and pressed upon them with a motive to do right, exactly at the turning-point where the risk became greatest of their determining to do wrong.

But even if these special interpositions cannot be traced, you are to re-

member that the whole judicature of conscience is constructed on the principle of counsel being administered at the precise moment when temptation is urgent. This is one of those peculiarities in conscience which will make it so stern a witness against every man who dies in his sins. It is not in moments of calm reflection alone that conscience delivers a verdict on this or that action; just as a friend, with whom we hold serious discourse, may offer opinions and tender advice. If this were the whole course of conscience, we should have nothing to appeal to in any sudden emergence but certain registered decisions, which it might be hard to recall, or at least, to invest with any influence, amid the urgent pleadings of passion or interest. But conscience tenders its remonstrance precisely at the moment when temptation plies us with its bait: the two things occur together as though the one produced the other—the message, which ought to influence the verdict, is delivered at the instant of ascending the judgment seat. It is not the result of any process of argument which is announced to you through the pleadings of conscience: you cannot tell whence the unseen monitor has sprung; but there is no debate as to his presence; and the voice compels an audience, even where there is the most set determination of acting counter to its suggestions. And this, as we have said, will make conscience the most fearful of witnesses against every man who persists in his wickedness. He must have carried with him into every scene of iniquity the remonstrating principle; and as he went after his unrighteousness, he left not behind his counsellor and reprover; but that counsellor and reprover was continually at his side, refusing to part company, urging advice in the precise instant of danger, only to be silenced as a monitor by the commission of the sin, and then to wake up immediately as an avenger.

We are willing therefore to put out of sight those strange interferences which may be traced, we believe, in every man's history, and which give evidence of a watchful Providence, ever anxious to cast obstacles in the way of the sinner, and to furnish him with fresh motives to do right at the moment when most tempted to do wrong. We feel confident that such

interferences are frequently made, so that there is much in the experience of every one of us which is accurately parallel to the incident under review, to the coming of the message from Pilate's wife precisely when Pilate took his place on the judgment seat. But we will not insist on this fact; for it is a fact which is only to be established in individual cases by close observation, and therefore may be easily either questioned or denied. We confine ourselves altogether to the jurisdiction of conscience, conscience which every man bears about in his own breast, so that no one may plead that he knows nothing of its existence. We declare of this principle, that it is its very nature to be most energetic when there is most need for remonstrance, and to deliver its counsel at the exact moment when the individual is urged by temptation. We know not how this comes to pass: it is as though at the presence of danger there started forth a guardian angel; through some most beneficent but inexplicable arrangement, you have only to set the foot in a perilous place, and you thereby call up an adviser, whose counsel is certain to be for your safety. But, mysterious as it may be, such is actually the case: through no tedious process of ratiocination or deduction, but instantaneously, with all the freshness and all the vehemence of a living thing which had been watching an opportunity that it might pour in its counsel, does conscience rise up in the moment of temptation, and, by exhortation and threatening, seek to withhold you from what it denounces as wrong.

And therefore will there be something of the like testimony against every evil-doer, when God shall sit in judgment upon men, as against Pilate who was met by the message from his wife when the Jews were urging him to crucify the Christ. The like testimony—because that evil-doer had equally to go forward in the face of a remonstrance, and to perpetrate the wrong against the warning and entreaty of the most intimate associate. The condemning thing with Pilate was, that the message came upon him in the moment of emergence: had it come sooner, the effect might have worn off, and it must have been unavailing if later. And the condemning thing with any one of us—so far as conscience has to do with the sentence—will be, that we were warn-

ed and tempted at the same instant: had the warning preceded the temptation, we might have pleaded that it was weakened by distance; and of course, had it followed, it could not have aided us in resistance. But forasmuch as the two were contemporaneous, the temptation seeming always to call forth the warning, there will be nothing to urge in our own vindication; no more than with Pilate, who, on taking his seat as a judge, received the message which should have bound him to "judge righteous judgment."

What a scene will it be when this Roman stands forth to answer for himself at the tribunal of Christ! The judge will be the prisoner, the prisoner the Judge. Christ was arraigned before Pilate, and now Pilate must be arraigned before Christ. How changed the condition of the two! Who can recognize in that majestic form, from whose face the earth and the heavens flee away, the defenceless Being, who, pursued by the imprecations and blasphemies of a desperate multitude, stood meekly before the Roman governor, waiting his award of life or of death? Around the Roman were then all the tokens of power: he bore the commission of the mistress of the world, and seemed to have absolutely at his disposal the persecuted man whom his disciples and friends had forsaken in the hour of peril. But now that persecuted man appears as "King of kings, and Lord of lords:" ten thousand times ten thousand angels wait to do his will: and the myriads of human kind, summoned by his voice from the grave, are to receive from his decision eternal allotments, whether of happiness beyond thought, or of wretchedness without limit. And the Roman is there, the scornful man who would not wait an answer to his own solemn question, "what is truth?" the cowardly man, who would not stand to his own conviction of right; the unjust man, who could deliver up the innocent to death; the presumptuous, self-deceiving man, who could wash his hands in water, and think to excuse his dipping them in blood. He will know that awful Being on the great white throne: he will repeat to himself his own words to the Jews, "Behold the man!"—the man on whom I sat as judge, the man whom I surrendered to the will of his enemies,

the man whom I knew to be guiltless, but whom I abandoned, because I believed Him to be powerless, unable to avenge an insult, or punish a wrong. But now, in place of a crown of thorns, there is upon his head the diadem of the universe, and, instead of the reed, there is the rod of iron in his hand, with which to rule the nations, so that "as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers."

And if we may venture to go yet further in anticipating the scenes of the judgment, will not his own wife be a witness against Pilate? will she not be forced to declare how she told him of the terrors which had been wrought into her spirit, through some mysterious representation, of the very events which are then coming to pass? and will not this testimony, even if corroborated by no other, demand and justify the sentence of condemnation, and drive down the criminal to the lowest depth of woe?

It is among the most affecting of the probabilities which belong to the last judgment, that relations and friends will have part in giving evidence against the impenitent and unbelieving. It must be so, where the assault has been through the channel or avenue of the affections. We do not know how you can avoid the conclusion, that the righteous parent will be appealed to in proof of the inexcusableness of the unrighteous child; and that the child who has beautifully exemplified the truths of Christianity, but gained for them no entrance into the breast of a parent, must testify against that parent, and vindicate his condemnation. And it will not be the wife of Pilate alone that shall lift her voice against her husband. Wheresoever human affections and ties have been enlisted, so to speak, on the side of religion, it must come to pass that the sentence on irreligion will be justified from the witness of one who loved and was beloved, who would perhaps have given life to insure happiness to the party that would not be persuaded, but must, nevertheless, attest the equity of the doom which consigns that party to the fire and the worm. Let any one, on whom the duties of religion are pressed through the voice of one deservedly dear—whether the voice of parent, or of child, or of husband, or of wife—but think of that voice as calling down eternal judg-

ment hereafter, if those duties remain neglected; and possibly there will be a shrinking from what it is so fearful to contemplate, and a determination, in the strength of the Lord, to seek forthwith the things which belong unto peace.

Our wish for the yet unconverted amongst you is, that, with Pilate's wife, you might be made to suffer many things because of Christ. O for the vision! O for the dream!—the vision which should scatter every other, the dream which might break your fatal slumbers. I know not what the dream was which roused the wife of Pilate. But it was a dream of terror—it would seem of unmingled terror: she had “suffered many things;” and probably the Redeemer passed before her, trampling down his enemies, and having all his garments red with their blood. O for such a dream again! but not alone: we would have it followed by a different vision, a vision of this terrible Being as ready to save to the uttermost all who come unto God through Him. And it will be thus followed: the dread of the wrath of the

Lamb must produce desire for his favor; and where this desire exists, it will urge to those endeavors which are never made in sincerity, but they are made with success. We want you, then, to be visited with a vision of Judgment to come: and if you would only sit down to a calm investigation of the relation in which you stand to the moral Governor of the universe, it could hardly fail but that the vision would be upon you, and dread and dark things come crowding from the future. And if in every case—and the cases are of daily occurrence—in which it is virtually put to your decision, whether you will crucify the Son of God afresh, or acknowledge Him as your Savior, you would then go up, as it were, to the Judgment seat under the impression of this vision, with the message which it conveyed ringing in your ears, indeed we can be sure, that, when the last trumpet sounds, and the last assize is held, you will look with confidence on the descending Judge, and know in Him a brother and Redeemer.

SERMON XIV.

THE EXAMINATION OF CAIN.

* And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.—GENESIS iv. 9, 10.

The brief notices which the inspired historian has given of the condition of our first parents immediately after the fall, do not suffice to answer the questions which naturally suggest themselves to the mind. We have no power of knowing what alteration they felt in themselves as consequent on the trans-

gression of which they had been guilty. We read, indeed, that, before the fall, they had no feeling of shame at the not being clothed; but that no sooner had they eaten of the forbidden fruit than their eyes were opened, and they knew themselves naked. But this is our only information as to any consciousness of

the change which they had undergone. Whether they felt the sentence of death in their members, whether they could judge, from some difference in the throbbings of life, that they were no longer what they had been, children of immortality—on this it were idle to advance even conjecture; they knew that they must die; they knew in a measure what death was, for they saw the strugglings of animals which they offered in sacrifice: but it is a strange, inexplicable thing, the transition from incorruptible to corruptible, from immortal to mortal; and we may not pretend to say whether the pulse and the feeling gave any notice of the change.

But at least, we may believe that Adam and Eve awaited with much anxiety the first instance of death. It was long in coming; year rolled away after year, and still they saw no infliction of the curse, except on the beast of the field and the fowl of the air. Perhaps the delay took away something of the horror with which they had at first contemplated the threatened visitation. Their family multiplied, sons and daughters were born unto them, and they may almost have forgotten, as healthfulness perhaps beamed from every face, that a day must come when the ground, which yielded them sustenance, must yield them a grave. At least, our first parents may have said, It will not be our lot to mark the irruption of the destroyer. We, in all probability, shall be the first victims: for it may not have entered into their thoughts, that so vast was the disorganization consequent on sin, that children might die before their parents, and the old carry the young out to burial.

Alas for Adam and Eve! if they either thought less of the evil they had wrought, because its consequences came not visibly for year after year; or if they expected, that, being themselves the first to fall before the storm, they should know comparatively but little of its fearfulness. Alas for them! seeing that they were to live to behold the entrance of death, an entrance which should demonstrate, in a manner inconceivably terrible, how vast was the corruption which had been wrought into their nature.

There is nothing more memorable than this—that the first instance of death was the most convincing of all possible

proofs, that human nature had become radically depraved, that it was capable of any wickedness, in consequence of the original transgression. It might have been supposed, that, though the seeds of evil had been sown in our nature through the disobedience of our first parents, time would have been required for their development, so that it would not be until the human family had multiplied and spread, that any thing of enormous wickedness would be wrought upon the earth. But the precise reverse was the matter of fact. The very first that was born of woman, committed the very foulest crime that can be perpetrated by man. There was no time needed for the growth of evil: the nature, once corrupted, was capable of the worst that can be even imagined. You might think, when you look on the savage, stained with some deed of signal atrocity, that he is but a proof of the gradual degeneracy of our nature—supposing him to have become thus frightfully ferocious through the growth of barbarism in successive generations. You compare him with the inhabitants of more civilized countries, and you conclude that it is just because he has been longer left to harden and deteriorate, without coming into contact with any counter influence, that he commits without remorse the most desperate crimes. And we do not of course deny, that civilization has a great deal to do with the form and measure of prevalent iniquity: the laws of a well-regulated society will proscribe, and make rare, many of those manifestations of evil which stalk unrestrained in a barbarous state. But what we wish you to be certified of, is, that, though with different degrees of civilization there may be different degrees in the exhibition of human corruption, there are not different degrees in that corruption itself. Man is the same, radically the same, in one state and in another: he is capable of the same, the very same, villainies, though he may not in both instances be actually guilty of them: the polish of civilization may conceal, and the rudeness of barbarism may bring out, evil tendencies, but those tendencies equally exist, however unequally they may be displayed.

And we can never want other proof of this truth than that which was forced on our first parents, when, after long ex-

pecting the entrance of death, and perhaps, seeing but little to persuade them, that, in eating of the fruit, they had actually poisoned the nature which they were to transmit, they beheld Abel lying murdered, and knew that a brother's hand had dealt the fatal blow. If Abel had sickened and died in what we now call a natural course, it would have been a grievous spectacle for Adam and Eve: they would have hung over their wasting child in unutterable anguish, marking in every pang the effect of their disobedience, and reproaching themselves as the cause of his sufferings. And when at last death had made good his conquest, and seized the first-fruit of that immeasurable harvest which he is yet reaping from the earth, they would have thrown themselves in their agony on the corpse, and then have recoiled from the touch, shuddering at the coldness of the dead. Still there would have been nothing here but what they had looked for, nothing but what they had known to be inevitable: the first dead body would have been an appalling, strange, mysterious thing; but nevertheless as they gazed on the calm, still, features, they might have felt that there was rest in that awful sleep. They would not necessarily have risen from their first acquaintance with death, increasingly convinced of the fearful consequences of their sin. Those consequences might have been presented in their least terrible shape. The dying youth might have blessed them with his parting breath; he might have smiled affectionately upon them, and something of hope might have beamed from his eye, as though to assure them, that, after all, death was not so formidable a thing: and they might have dug his grave, and laid him there to his long repose, half-comforted with the thought, that, although they had brought a curse upon their nature, that curse was less tremendous than their fears had supposed.

But Abel murdered—Abel stretched upon the earth, a ghastly mangled thing—what a spectacle was this! Who had done it? had he been his own executioner? That were an awful thing, thrillingly demonstrative of the depravity of the nature which had been created in innocence. But this was incredible—so gentle, so meek, so pious, it could not be that he who had so recently

brought of the firstlings of his flock, and to whom and to whose offering the Lord had had respect, should have done a deed from which nature recoils, and courted that which was the object of a dark and undefined dread. But if Abel had not slain himself, by whom could the wounds have been inflicted? Alas, when there were yet so few in the world, there was little difficulty in fixing on the criminal. Adam and Eve must have remembered how, when the offering of their elder son was rejected, "Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell." Yet was it possible? human nature had been depraved, but had it been depraved enough for this? what, the brother kill the brother? was man so incurably wicked, that, in place of waiting for the sentence upon sin, he could sin beyond thought in order to hasten its coming? It seemed too bad for belief: Cain no doubt denied the atrocity; he denied it afterwards to God, and is not likely to have confessed it to his parents. Then these parents may still have thought that they had not utterly corrupted their nature: they could more easily leave Abel's death unexplained, than admit the explanation which made a murderer of Cain. But they must have been ready to sink into the earth at the view of what they had done in disobeying God—ay, and the men of every age were taught, that what was immediately caused by the fall, was the total, radical, corruption of human nature—when the Eternal One Himself convicted the criminal, exclaiming in the words of our text, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground."

But we have spoken hitherto only of the crime which had been perpetrated by Cain, being very anxious that you should judge from that crime the extent of the moral ruin which had been wrought through apostasy. There is certainly a surprising difference, on every human calculation, between the sin of our first parents, and the sin of their first child—the one, the eating a morsel of fruit, the other, the murder of a brother. But we may justly make use of the difference in estimating the effects of the original disobedience. Men will ask, in what degree was our nature depraved by the fall? are we to believe that it became very sinful, capable of

very great wickedness? We never think that any other answer is needed to such questions than is furnished by the history now under review. Adam and Eve transgressed through eating the forbidden fruit: they thus, in some measure or another, corrupted the nature which they had received innocent from God. But the very first being to whom this corrupted nature was communicated, raised his hand against his brother, and slew him out of mere envy, though he had done him no wrong—judge ye then whether we are right in maintaining that human nature was radically and totally depraved by the fall, that it was instantly capable of the worst, not having to become gigantic in evil, but being so by being evil at all!

But we wish now to speak upon the trial, rather than upon the crime: the world was yet young, and there were no judicatories to take cognizance of offences—therefore did God, who, though his creatures had rebelled against Him, still held in his hands the government of the world, come forth from his solitude, and make “inquisition for blood.” It is probable that there were stated religious assemblings of the family of Adam, and that it was at one of these—the one which followed the murder—that the inquiry took place which is registered in our text. God had not deserted our guilty race in judgment on their apostasy; but, having spared them for the sake of the promised interference of a Mediator, He still condescended to hold intercourse with them in something of the same manner as whilst they yet inhabited Paradise. Thus, there must have been some direct manifestation of his presence, when on occasion of the presentation of offerings, He “had respect unto Abel and his offering, but unto Cain and his offering he had not respect.” This probably took place at one of the stated gatherings for purposes of religion: and it may have been at the next that God took occasion, from the absence of Abel, to address Cain with the interrogation with which our text opens.

But why—omniscient as God was, and, by his own after-statement, thoroughly cognizant of the guilt of Cain—why did He address the murderer with the question, “Where is Abel thy

brother?” in place of taxing him at once with the atrocious commission? Assuredly there could have been no need to God of additional information: it was in no sense the same as at a human tribunal, where questions are put that facts may be elicited. And in following this course, God acted as He had done on the only former occasion when He had sat, as it were, in judgment on human offenders. When our first parents had transgressed, God conducted his whole inquiry by questions, though we need not say that He must have been thoroughly acquainted with all that had passed. Adam hid himself from the Lord, conscious of guilt, and therefore dreading his presence. “And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?” God saw Adam in his concealment; yet He seemed to assume ignorance, and required the culprit to make himself known. And on Adam’s then saying that He was afraid because of his nakedness, fresh questions are put: “Who told thee that thou wast naked? hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?” The same system is pursued with the woman on whom Adam endeavors to shift all the blame. “The Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done?” But it is very observable that here the questions end: the woman throws the blame on the serpent, and God proceeds to pass sentence on the serpent, without prefacing it with any inquiry. “The Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle.”

But the method of question is again employed, so soon as there is again a human offender to be tried. “The Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother?” It can hardly be doubted that, in all these instances, the gracious design of God was to afford the criminals opportunity of confessing their crimes. We are greatly struck by the difference in the course adopted with a fallen man, and with a fallen angel. It is a difference analogous to the great but mysterious distinction, that He taketh not hold on angels, but that of the seed of Abraham He doth take hold. A fallen man was within the possibility of pardon, seeing that, long before he transgressed, a Surety had covenanted to be-

come the propitiation for his sin. And therefore might a fallen man be invited and encouraged to confess his sin, seeing that the gracious words were actually in force, though they had not yet been delivered, "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy." But there was no such possibility in the case of a fallen angel like Satan, who actuated the serpent; he had been cast out for ever from heaven; no mediator was to arise to accomplish his reconciliation to God; and therefore was he not invited to acknowledge his guilt, seeing that no acknowledgement could have effect on his doom.

It is in this way that we would explain the system of questioning which is so observable in God's dealings with the first human culprits. You must be aware how, throughout Scripture, there is attached the greatest importance to confession of sin, so that its being forgiven is spoken of as though it depended upon nothing but its being acknowledged. "If we confess our sins," saith the evangelist, "God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "Only," saith the prophet, "acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God." "If," saith the apostle, "thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus"—for "with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." We are not now to inquire into the reasons why the confession of sin should thus be instrumental to its forgiveness. It is sufficient to observe that the whole procuring cause of the forgiveness of sin is in the blood of a Redeemer: but that the application of this blood, in any particular instance, is justly made conditional on the acquirement and display of certain dispositions, which dispositions will evidence themselves in genuine contrition, and hearty confession. So that it is not that, by confessing our sins, we in any sense or measure deserve their forgiveness; but only that confession, when it is the language of the heart, argues the state of mind which God requires in those whom He pardons—a state of penitential sorrow for the past, and of humble resolution for the future. And therefore, when God attempts to draw a criminal to confession, He is to be understood as telling him that his sin is not unpardonable;

but that there is yet a way, through repentance, to forgiveness.

It is this, even this, which we consider indicated by the questions which He proposed to Cain. We say, the questions; for you observe that when the murderer, in his hardihood, had returned an insolent negative to the inquiry, "Where is Abel thy brother?" God plied him with a second question, "What hast thou done?" It may be that this question again referred to the murder: and then it is but a repetition of the first, a fresh attempt to extort from Cain confession of his crime. But we rather understand it in another sense, as referring to Cain's refusal to confess. "What hast thou done?"—it is as much as to say, I have given thee opportunity to acknowledge the crime of whose commission I need no evidence but the blood crying from the ground: thou hast refused the opportunity: alas, then, what hast thou done? thou hast now made thy punishment inevitable, even as thy guilt has all along been unquestionable.

And did the crime, then, of Cain come within the range of forgiveness? Supposing it to have been confessed, might it also have been pardoned? We presume not to say what God's course with Cain would have been, had the murderer displayed contrition in place of hardness and insolence. The crime had been fearful; and we must believe that, in any case, the moral Governor of the universe would have so treated the criminal as to mark his sense of the atrociousness of that which he had done. But there is no room for doubt, that there was forgiveness even for Cain; even then there was blood which spake better things than that of Abel, the blood of Him who, on the cross, besought pardon for his murderers, and who, in thus showing that his death made expiation even for its authors, showed also that there was no human sin which its virtue would not reach. And we do reckon it among the most beautiful of the early notices of the prevalence of that atonement which was to be made in the fulness of time, that God should have thus lingered with such a criminal as Cain, delaying to pass sentence in hopes of obtaining confession. Oh, it is true that there may have been given but feeble intimations to the patriarchs of

that great scheme of rescue, which, as developed to ourselves in the Gospel of Christ, assures us that, though our sins be as scarlet, they may be white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they may be as wool: yet, whether or not these fathers of our race had any clear idea as to the mode in which provision would be made for the forgiveness of sin, we may be sure that they were freed from the most oppressive of all burdens, the burden of a belief, or even a fear, that their offences were too great to be pardoned. The history of Cain might have sufficed to remove this. Was not God omniscient? could any solitude withdraw from his penetrating gaze? could any covering hide guilt from his all-seeing eye? Wherefore, then, did He question Cain, as though wanting information, and unable to proceed in his office of Judge, without fuller and more definite evidence? Nay, the patriarchs must have known, as well as ourselves, that these questions were designed to induce confession, not to extort proof. And why did God labor to induce confession, except that He sought to bring Cain to repentance? and why to repentance, except that He might then bestow on him pardon?

But if Cain might have been pardoned, had he been but penitent, where was the contrite sinner who need despair of the forgiveness of his sins? Ay, it is thus that the questions under review might have served as a revelation, during the infancy of the world, of the readiness of the Almighty to blot out our iniquities as a cloud, and as a thick cloud our sins. There were then no gracious declarations as to the cleansing power of the blood of a Redeemer; and there had not passed over this fallen creation, words which have only to be breathed, and its waste places ought to break forth into singing, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." But the trembling penitent was not necessarily harassed with apprehensions of vengeance. There were other visions floating before him than those of an implacable Deity and an inevitable wrath; he could comfort himself with the thought that there was mercy with the Most High, even for the chief of sinners; and if asked on what he rested such a confidence, he might have pointed to God's dealings with

Cain, and have declared that he found grounds of assurance in the questions, "Where is thy brother?" and, "What hast thou done?"

But let us now observe the manner in which Cain acted, whilst God was thus graciously endeavoring to lead him to repentance. If we had not abundant evidence, in our own day—yea, in our own cases—of the hardening power of sin, we might wonder at the effrontery which the murderer displayed. Did he, could he, think that denial would avail anything with God, so that, if he did not confess, he might keep his crime undetected? I know not what measure of blindness he may have wrought for himself through allowing his malice to urge him on to murder. But when we find it affirmed, as it is by God Himself in the book of Psalms, of a wicked man, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself," we may believe that there are scarce any limits to the moral hardness and darkness which are naturally the produce of continuance in sin. There may come upon a man who, by persisting in iniquity, sears and stupefies conscience, such a dulness of apprehension, such a confusion of right and wrong, such a loss of all distinction between the finite and the infinite, that he shall be able to persuade himself of the truth of a lie, and to ascribe even to God his own faults and imperfections.

It may, therefore, be, that it was not in mere insolence that Cain affirmed to God that he knew nothing of Abel; he may have been so blinded by his sin as to lose all discernment of the necessary attributes of God, so that he actually imagined that not to confess would be almost to conceal. Under this point of view, his instance ought to serve as a warning to us of the deadening power of wrong-doing, informing us that there is no such ready way of benumbing the understanding, or paralyzing the reason, as the indulging passion, and withstanding conscience. We know not where we shall stop, if we once hearken to our evil affections, and allow them to lead us captive, in spite of that "still small voice" which pleads at some time or another, in every man's breast, for God and for truth. We may not stop until those powers of mind, which are in vigorous play on all other science, are too enfeebled for any due apprehension of an

invisible ruler, and the pale lamp which Deity hath lit up within us, and which may still shed some lustre on natural things, burns too dimly and fitfully to allow of our looking, otherwise than through vapor and mist, on what is spiritual and eternal. With Cain we may sin, till, besotted into a practical ignorance which could hardly be expected in the savage of the desert, we dream of hiding from God what we can hide from man, and are ready, were the Almighty to question us on some matter of fact, to assert want of knowledge, in the actual hope of concealing from the Omniscient what we refuse to confess.

But Cain did more than assert ignorance of what had happened to Abel: he taxed God with the unreasonableness of proposing the question, as though it were a strange thing to suppose that he might concern himself with his brother. "Am I my brother's keeper?" There can be no need of our showing you, that this question marked the extraordinary impiety of Cain: every one shrinks from it; for had only some accident befallen Abel, it was to have been expected that his brother would manifest the greatest eagerness to discover his fate, and the greatest sorrow at finding him dead. Had his first assertion been true, that he knew nothing of his brother, what was to be said of the utter want of natural affection exhibited in the question which he went on to propose? There were then no brothers in the world but Cain and Abel; and he who could insolently ask, "Am I my brother's keeper?" when that brother was missing, might have been convicted, by those very words, of a fierceness which was equal to murder, and an audacity which would deny it even to God.

But we wish to dwell for a moment on this question of Cain as virtually containing the excuse which numbers in our own day would give, were God to come visibly down, and make inquisition for blood. You may start at the very mention of such an inquisition, and demand what we mean by supposing a possibility of your committing the same crime as Cain. Nay, it is not needful that your hands be red with slaughter, in order to your pleading that you are not your brother's keeper. We assert that God might come down, and make inquisition for blood, though there were

none upon whom actual murder could be charged. Is there no such thing in our crowded community as neglect of the poor? might not many a man be fixed on, who is in the enjoyment of every luxury of life, and who never gives even a passing thought to hundreds who are almost perishing within a stone's throw of his mansion, never personally inquiring into their wants, and never even employing others to relieve their destitution?

And what is to be said of the murder, the wholesale murder, which, in a spiritual sense, is chargeable on Christendom, and on ourselves as truly as on any of its sections? We speak of the murder of souls. Is it no murder, when thousands in our own land are left without the bread of life, consigned to starvation, through an utter destitution of the public means of grace? Is it no murder, when year after year idolatry is suffered to sweep away its vast host of victims, and we make no missionary effort commensurate with the enormous evil which we are called on to oppose? Nay, it is more than the murder of souls: it is the murder of the whole man, body and soul: for what say you to the multitude whose bones lie bleaching on the deserts of heathenism, a multitude which has perished through the power of superstition, having immolated themselves to some bloody idol, or been worn down by the macerations which falsehood has proscribed? Who will affirm that we are innocent herein? that there goes up against us no accusing voice from the thousands that are continually perishing through the abominations of Paganism? It is not wholly chargeable on ourselves, that these abominations prevail, that they have not long ago been supplanted by the genial influences of Christianity. But have we been valiant for the truth up to the measure of our ability? have we done our utmost towards spreading that Gospel, which alone can extinguish idolatry, and put an arrest on the destruction of vast portions of our race? So far as we have been negligent, so far as we have been remiss in bringing to bear upon heathenism the engines of Christianity—and, alas! how far below our powers have been our endeavors—we have been distinctly instrumental to the slaughter of our fellow-men, the slaughter of body and soul—

what we might have prevented, we may be said to have committed.

Then it would not be a process in which we had personally no concern, were the Almighty to descend that He might make inquisition for blood. And if each would honestly search into his own thoughts and feelings, he might find himself ready to meet every inquiry into the fate of his brother, with something of the question with which Cain answered God. If those who are neglectful of their fellow-men, caring little for the temporal distress by which numbers are consumed, and still less for the spiritual famine by which whole nations are wasted, were taxed with their negligence—taxed in such manner as should imply that they, in their measure, were answerable for a slaughter which is turning large districts of the earth into valleys like that to which the Prophet was carried, where lay, in mighty piles, the bones of many generations—oh, what would they commonly do but shift off the blame, urging that they had enough to do in consulting for themselves and their immediate dependents, and that there were no such links of association between them and the stranger as made it imperative that they should engage in large schemes of benevolence? Am I the keeper of the Hindu, the Indian, the Hottentot? Am I the keeper of the savage, who, on some distant continent or island, offers his first-born or himself to a blood-thirsty deity, the creation of his fears, the offspring of his ignorance? Is the savage thy brother? Is it, or is it not true, that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth?” If all have sprung from the same parents, then the wild wanderer, the painted barbarian, is thy brother, though civilization may have separated you by so wide an interval, that you scarcely seem to belong to the same race. And, being thy brother, it is but to imitate Cain, to plead that it is not thine office to attend to his welfare. It is thine office. There is no man who is not bound to do his utmost for the good of every other man. He is bound, because every man is the brother of every man. The missionary enterprize is nothing but the truth of universal brotherhood, reduced into practice. It is no mere burst of spiritu-

al chivalry, the fine and splendid scheme of lofty enthusiasts, who would carry into religion the passions which find vent in the heroic deeds of war. It is simply the doctrine of a common origin, suffered to produce its natural fruits. It is the acknowledgment of our having had but one father, registered in action as well as in word. And therefore let all learn, that, if they excuse themselves from the duty of ministering to the suffering; if they confine their solicitude and their liberality to the few with whom they are most closely connected, treating all the rest of the human family as strangers for whom they are not bound to care—ah, they may indeed imagine that they make out a very plausible case: for what have they to do with the savage and the foreigner? is there not enough nearer home to exhaust all their efforts!—but let them know assuredly, that, when the Lord cometh, as come He shall, to make inquisition for blood, they shall be dealt with as though like Cain, yet reeking from the slaughter of Abel, they had parried the inquiries of an all-seeing God with the insolent question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

But we have now to consider to what God appealed in the absence of confession from the murderer himself: He had striven to induce Cain to acknowledge his guilt; but, failing in this, He must seek elsewhere for evidence on which to convict him. And where does He find this evidence? He might undoubtedly have referred to his own omniscience, to the observation of an eye which never slumbers nor sleeps. Thinkest thou, He might have said to the culprit, that I require any testimony to assure me of thy guilt! Did I not see thee when thine hand was raised against thy brother? was I not by thy side, though thou didst impiously suppose thyself alone with thy victim, and thou dost now, as impiously, think that denial is the same thing as concealment? I want no evidence: I condemn thee for what I beheld: away, and be a wanderer and an outcast, a terror to thyself, and to all that shall meet thee.

But the observable thing is, that God did not thus appeal to his omniscience: He did not rest his conviction of Cain on the fact that the murder had been committed under the very eye of the

Judge: but He made the inanimate creation rise up, as it were, against the assassin, and dumb things became eloquent in demanding his condemnation. "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." And when the Almighty proceeds to pass sentence, the inanimate creation, which had testified to the guilt, is made to take part in the vengeance, as though it had been wronged and injured by the foul perpetration, and therefore claimed share in the punishment of the criminal. "And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand."

Who has not read, who has not heard, how murderers, though they have succeeded in hiding their guilt from their fellow-men, have seemed to themselves surrounded with witnesses and avengers, so that the sound of their own foot-tread has startled them as if it had been the piercing cry of an accuser, and the rustling of every tree, and the murmur of every brook, has sounded like the utterance of one clamorous for their punishment! It has been as nothing, that they have screened themselves from those around them, and are yet moving in society with no suspicion attaching to them of their having done so foul a thing as murder. They have felt, as though, in the absence of all accusation from beings of their own race, they had arrayed against themselves the whole visible creation, sun and moon and stars and forests and waters growing vocal that they might publish their crime. And I know not whether there may be any thing more in this than the mere goading and imaging of conscience; whether the disquieted assassin, to whose troubled eye the form of his victim is given back from every mirror in the universe, and on whose ear there falls no sound which does not come like the dying man's shriek, or the thundering call of the avenger of blood—whether he is simply to be considered as haunted and hunted by his own evil thoughts; or whether he be indeed subjected to some mysterious and terrible influences with which his crime has impregnated and endowed the whole material system. I cannot help feeling, when I consider the language of our text, as though there might be more than the

mere phantasms of a diseased and distracted mind in those forms of fear, and those sounds of wrath, which agitate so tremendously the yet undiscovered murderer. It may be, that, fashioned as man is out of the dust of the earth, there are such links between him and the material creation, that, when the citadel of his life is rudely invaded, the murderous blow is felt throughout the vast realm of nature; so that, though there be no truth in the wild legend, that, if the assassin enter the chamber where the victim is stretched, the gaping wounds will bleed afresh, yet may earth, sea, air, have sympathy with the dead, and form themselves into furies to hunt down his destroyer. It may have been more than a mere rhetorical expression when God assigned a voice to the ground that was saturated with human blood. And there may be utterances, which are more than the coinings of his own racked conscience, to the murderer—utterances which, though heard only by himself, because himself alone hath dislocated a chord in the great harmonies of creation—may speak piercingly of the frightful atrocity, and invoke the vengeance of Heaven on the wretch who hath dared to withdraw one note from the universal anthem.

But it is not exclusively, nor even chiefly, as indicating a possible, though inexplicable sympathy between material things and the victim of the murderer, that we reckon the statement before us deserving of being carefully pondered. Setting aside this sympathy, there is much that is very memorable in the appeal of God to a voice from Abel's blood, when there were other witnesses which might have been produced. Had not the soul of Abel entered the separate state? was not his spirit with God? and might not the immortal principle, violently detached as it had been from the body, have cried for vengeance on the murderer? We read in the Book of Revelation of "the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held." And of those souls we are told, that "they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" It may therefore be, that the souls of the dead cry for judgment upon those who

have compassed their death: why then might not the soul of Abel, rather than his blood, have been adduced by God? even had it been silent, surely its very presence in the invisible world gave a more impressive testimony than the stream which had crimsoned the ground.

In answer to this, we are to consider, in the first place, that it did not please God to vouchsafe any clear revelation of the invisible state, during the earlier ages of the world. We cannot determine what degree of acquaintance our first parents possessed with a life after death; but when we remember what cloud and darkness hung over the grave, even to those who lived under the Jewish economy, we may well doubt whether Adam and Eve had any clear apprehension of a state in which wickedness would be eternally punished, and righteousness everlastingly rewarded. And it is to my mind one of the most touching of the circumstances which characterize their condition, that God, in making inquisition for the blood of their son, should have given a voice, as it were, to the dead body, but none to the living soul. Oh, how soothingly would it have fallen on the ear of the agonized parents, had God spoken of Abel as existing in the invisible world, as testifying by his presence in some bright scene which the spoiler could not enter, that the hand of violence had forced him from the earth. That Abel had fallen by the hand of his brother, was the most terrible of all possible proofs, that the original transgression had corrupted human nature to the core. But it would have done much—not indeed to counterbalance this proof, but to soften the anguish which it could not fail to produce—had there been any intimation that the death of the body was not the death of the man, and that Cain had but removed Abel from a scene of trouble to one of deep repose.

This however was denied them: they must struggle on through darkness, sustained only by a dim conjecture of life and immortality. Indeed, indeed, I know not whether there be any thing more affecting in the history of our first parents. Oh, bless God, ye who have had to sorrow over dead children, that ye live when life and immortality have been brought to light by the Gospel. Your's has not been the deep and desolate bitterness of those on whom fell no

shinings from futurity. Unto you have come sweet whisperings from the invisible world, whisperings as of the one whom you loved, telling you of a better land, where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." But alas for Adam and Eve! their's was grief, stern, dark, unmingled. Taught by the foul deed of Cain how fatally they had tainted their nature, they were not also taught, by any information as to the condition of Abel, how nevertheless that nature might be purified and exalted. They listen with all earnestness as God prosecutes inquiry into the murder. Perhaps some consolatory word will be dropped, some expression which shall partially disclose to them the secrets of the grave. But they listen in vain; the time has not yet come when God would please to reveal another world; and it must have been almost as though there had been a repetition of the stroke which had made them so heavy at heart, when in place of any notice of the soul of Abel, they only heard God declare, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground."

But indeed there are better things to be said on the fact, that it was Abel's blood, and not his soul, which found a voice to demand vengeance on the murderer. The souls, as we have seen from the Book of Revelation, of numbers who had fallen by the sword of persecution, cried to God that He would judge those whose cruelty had forced them from the earth. But we can hardly interpret this cry as that of a desire for revenge,—revenge, that is, for wrongs individually and personally received. There were something quite at variance with our every notion of glorified spirits, in supposing that, in place of forgiving their enemies, they long and pray for their being destroyed. The best interpretation therefore, which we can put on the passage in the Book of Revelation, would seem to be, that, forasmuch as the persecutors were the enemies of God, and the great desire of the souls of the righteous must be for the glory of God, the cry, "How long, O Lord, holy and true?" denotes intense longing for the predicted season when the kingdoms of the world are to become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ, when all opposing powers shall finally yield to that of the Mediator.

There may be a difficulty in clearing a desire for vengeance of all unholy passion, when the parties on whom the vengeance is to descend have cruelly wronged those by whom the desire is expressed: but we must believe that hereafter, when every lesser feeling shall be absorbed in those of love of God and zeal for his honor, there will be a holy longing for the overthrow of the inveterate foes of the Church, which shall have no alliance whatsoever with what we now call vindictiveness, though these foes may have been personally injurious to the glorified spirits.

If there were nothing to be avenged but wrongs done to themselves, it cannot be thought that souls in the separate state would cry for the lighting down of God's mighty arm. But it is also God who has been wronged; it is God's honor which has to be vindicated; and souls which would breathe only forgiveness for any personal injury, may manifest nothing but the ardency of the holiest affection in breathing desires for vengeance on those who have done despite to the Creator and Redeemer.

And yet, though we cannot charge any thing of human vindictiveness on the souls of them slain for the word of God, which St. John saw beneath the altar, we must all feel as though there were something beautifully expressive in the silence maintained by the spirit of Abel. It would indeed, as we have said, have served as a Revelation, full of consolatory truth to Adam and Eve, had God assigned a voice to the soul, rather than to the blood, of their slaughtered son. But who would not have felt as though it had been to make Abel revenged, to represent his spirit as crying to the Almighty for judgment on his murderer? The case would have been different from that of the souls under the altar, inasmuch as the wrong had been more evidently personal, directed against the individual, rather than against a body, to injure which was to offer insult to God. And we could not therefore have so easily disentangled the expressed desire for vengeance from all those earthly and sinful feelings which cannot, as we know, have any subsistence in the disembodied souls of the righteous. But now we seem to find, in the silence of Abel's spirit, the same forbearance, the same eagerness for the good of the cruel and

injurious, as was expressed by Christ when being crucified, and by Stephen when being stoned. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," exclaimed Jesus as his murderers nailed Him to the tree. And just ere he fell asleep, Stephen "kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." We know not how Abel, the first martyr, died. We are not told what was his last utterance, nor what the look which he cast upon Cain, as he felt that life was ebbing fast away. But we seem able to follow his spirit into the separate state; and we may venture to gather that he died with forgiveness on his lips, from the fact that he entered God's presence with no complaint against his murderer. He could not cause that the dumb should not speak. He could not prevent the ground, which had drunk in his blood, from crying unto God to avenge the foul outrage. But the immortal principle, which might have poured forth the narrative of the crime, and have besought that the Lord, to whom vengeance belongeth, would interpose for the punishment of the criminal—this appears to have been meekly silent, as though it would have shielded the murderer, rather than have exposed him to his just retribution.

Oh, I cannot but think that in God's reference to the blood of Abel as the only accuser, there was a designed and beautiful lesson as to the forgiveness of injuries. God was not pleased to give, at the moment, an explicit revelation as to the immortality of Abel. But so far as that immortality was ascertained from other sources, and in proportion that, in the progress of time, it grew into an article of faith, there was a most expressive statement as to the character which God requires in those whom He accepts, in the statement that it was not Abel, but only his blood, which cried out for vengeance. You know, that, in the Gospel, our obtaining forgiveness from God is made conditional on our forgiving those by whom we may be wronged. "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." And was not the same truth taught, by example, if not by word, from the earliest days, seeing

that, when God would bring an accusing voice against Cain, He could only find it in the dumb earth reeking with blood, though the soul of Abel was before Him, and might have been thought ready to give witness with an exceeding great and bitter cry? Abel forgave his murderer—otherwise could he not have been forgiven of God—and we learn that he forgave his murderer, from the fact, that it was only his blood which cried aloud for vengeance.

Thus is there something very instructive in the absence of any voice but the voice from the ground. There is also matter for deep thought in the fact, that it was blood which sent up so penetrating a cry. It was like telling the young world of the power which there would be in blood to gain audience of the Most High. I do not say, that, whilst there were yet but feeble notices of a Redeemer, men might gather, from the energy ascribed to the blood of Abel, the virtue which would be resident in that of Christ. But to ourselves, unto whom has been laid open the great scheme of redemption, it may certainly come like one of the first notices of atonement through blood, which speaketh better things than that of Abel, that so mighty a voice went up in accusation of Cain. What was there in blood, that it could give, as it were, life to inanimate things, causing them to become vocal, so that the very Godhead Himself was moved by the sound? The utterance, we think, did but predict that when one,

to whom Abel had had respect in presenting in sacrifice the firstlings of his flock, should fall, as Abel fell, beneath the malice of the wicked, there would go up from the shed blood a voice that would be hearkened to in the heavenly courts, and prevail to the obtaining whatsoever it should ask.

Blessed be God that this blood does not plead for vengeance alone. It does plead for vengeance on the obdurate, who, like Cain, resist the invitation of God: but it pleads also for the pardon of the murderers, so that it can expiate the crime which it proves and attests. And whilst the blood of the slain pleads for us, the slain Himself is not silent. Abel could only refrain from speech in the invisible world—but Christ is not merely not our accuser, He is even our advocate. O blessed and glorious difference! We have not, like Cain, raised the hand to slay a brother, but alas! we have destroyed ourselves; and the cry for vengeance ascends from a creation which “groaneth and travaileth” through this our iniquity. But this cry is lost in a mightier, the cry, “It is finished,” the cry of a surety, the cry of an Intercessor. Let us only then take heed that we copy not Cain in his insolent refusal to acknowledge his guilt, and though, as against him, there be a cry from the earth, demanding our punishment, there will be a cry from the firmament which was silent, if it did not accuse the murderer—“Deliver them from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom.”



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